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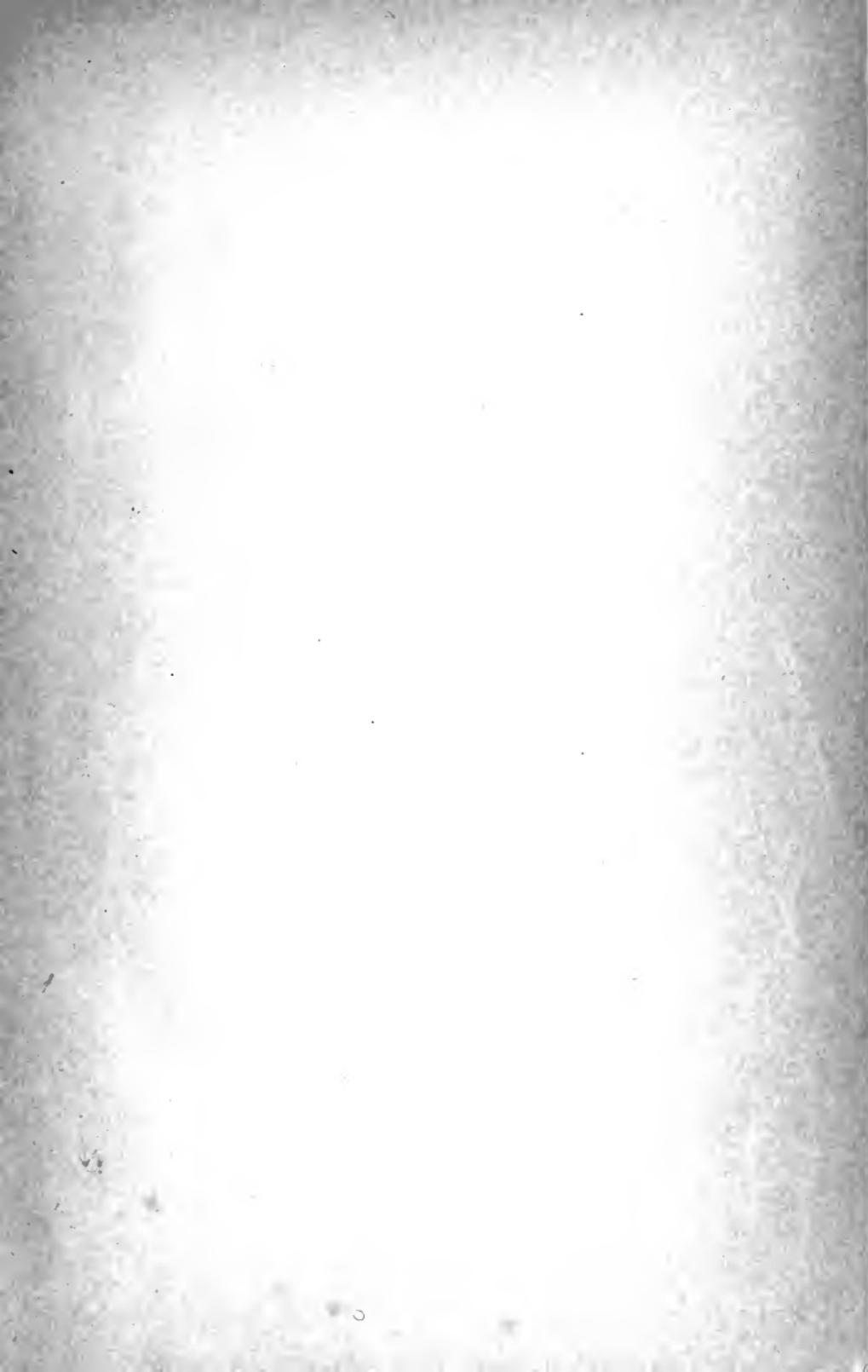
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KING ALFRED



# KING ALFRED

AS EDUCATOR OF HIS PEOPLE AND MAN  
OF LETTERS

BY

STOPFORD A. BROOKE

WITH AN APPENDIX

OF PASSAGES FROM THE WRITINGS OF ALFRED, SELECTED  
AND TRANSLATED FROM THE OLD ENGLISH

BY KATE M. WARREN



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## PREFACE

THE little treatise on King Alfred which follows this Preface is taken from a book of mine on Early English literature, and is one of its chapters. It is chiefly concerned with the king's work as an educator of his people, and as a man of letters, but it also dwells briefly on him as the ruler, the lawgiver, the warrior, and the statesman. No doubt, Alfred's lofty character is seen most clearly in the work he did both in war and peace; but there is an inner life of thought and feeling in public men of which the world sees little; and this, which in Alfred was sorrowful, sensitive, humble-minded, and profoundly religious, appears in the additions he inserted into the translations he made of Latin books for the instruction of his clergy, his nobles, his people, and for his own private pleasure. The style too in which he wrote—childlike, at times, in its simplicity and sincerity, and marked by an individual naïveté—is also a revelation of the way in which his mind and spirit worked together.

Some of these personal additions to the originals I have placed in the following chapter, and others have been placed in the Appendix, which consists of passages selected and translated from most of the books Alfred put into English. These have been done, and the whole thrown into its present form, by Miss Kate Warren. She offered to do this work, and it is entirely her own. Her translations have been made with intentional literalness, in order, if possible, to give in modern English some resemblance to Alfred's style. It is, until we

come to its directness and excellent brevity in the *English Chronicle*, and to its greater ease in the *Boethius*, the style of a beginner in prose, of one who had no good models to learn from or to imitate. But it is all the more interesting for that. Alfred began literary English prose.

Four extracts have been made from the *Cura Pastoralis*—the *Herdsman's Book*. It will be felt, on reading them, how difficult it was for Alfred to grasp the Latin idioms and transfer them into English. He did better afterwards. These passages from Gregory's book express ideas both on teaching and governing which illustrate the methods of Alfred's public work; and they lodged so deeply in his mind that their spirit appears in the additions he made to the translation, done in his later years, of the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

The passages taken from the king's translation of Bæda's *History* are fairly known, and their importance suggested their insertion. The first has become one of the universal illustrations used in literature, and the second tells the tale of the birth of English poetry written in England. It has been doubted of late whether Alfred made this translation, first, because there is no trace of a West Saxon original; secondly, that the only internal evidence for the king's authorship is the insertion of the West Saxon genealogy, which is not carried beyond his accession; thirdly, that the MSS. we possess are for the most part in an Anglian (Mercian) dialect. For these reasons, and others too long for record in this Preface, Dr. T. Miller infers that the Old English translation of Bæda was not made by Alfred, but probably in a Mercian monastery by a Mercian scholar of the period. But the statement of the king's authorship in Ælfric's homily on Gregory; the Latin couplet—

Historicus quondam fecit me Bæda latinum  
Alfred rex Saxo transtulit ille pius

found in a MS. of the Old English *Bæda* in Cambridge ; and William of Malmesbury's testimony, are strong confirmation of the traditional belief. As to the Mercian dialect-forms in the translation, they probably came from the Mercian scholars who lived with the king and no doubt assisted him in his translation. Æthelstan and Werewulf, learned men whom he loved, his chaplains, were Mercians. So was Werfrith of Worcester, who was frequently with him. So was Plegmund of Canterbury. All his English assistants were Mercians, and no one is likely to imagine that Alfred did not entrust his earlier translations for careful revision to his English friends and fellow-labourers. It would not be surprising to find Mercian forms in the *Herdsman's Book*.

The passages from the *Orosius* require no comment ; but a large number have been made from that part of the *English Chronicle* which is generally supposed to have been the work of Alfred himself. Miss Warren has continued her extracts beyond the year 891, where in the chapter on Alfred I make his work to cease. I followed then what I considered the best authority ; but I see no reason, if we believe that Alfred wrote the first part of the Danish wars, why we should not believe that he also wrote the second. The improvement in the style may be accounted for. Alfred, in these later years, had gained greater experience and ease in writing. There is no clear evidence that he wrote any of this history ; but it is a conjecture as probable as it is pleasant. It would suit Alfred's temper to record the wars he waged with so much fervour on behalf of his people.

If he wrote this part of the *Chronicle*, the records he made illustrate his character. They are concise, clear, practical. No personal element intrudes, no boasting, no abuse of his foes, no anger at their treachery—honest, luminous, forcible history and no more. And these elements in them present a curious contrast

to the sensitive, personal, spiritual, even the ornamented writing in the king's translation of Boethius. It has been said that similes are rare in Alfred's writing. Alfred invents some in the *Boethius*, and we find others also in his work.

The extracts from the *Consolation of Philosophy* are naturally the most numerous in the Appendix, for in that translation Alfred let himself loose, and made many additions to his original. It was his last large work, and we have in it an image of the temper and spirit of the king when the labour of his life was, in a time of long hoped for peace, drawing to its close. We touch in them the lonely hidden spirit of Alfred. We feel the principles, social, moral and spiritual, which ruled his life. We see him as his children and his intimate friends saw him. The wise ruler appears in them, the king conscious of his rank; but strangely mixed with that, the man to whom all men were equal if they were good and true. Rank, wealth, and power were to Alfred the mere clothing of the man. Goodness, truth, fidelity, honourable work, trust in God, made the man who, if a king were false to these righteous things, was greater than the king. There was a Judge before whom power, cleverness, wealth, and rank were worthless, and Alfred lived in that faith and ruled himself as king thereby. In that faith was held his view of men, and his behaviour to them. There are few pleasanter pictures in history than those in which we see Alfred in equal social intercourse with his friends, his followers, and the men who came to tell him tales of far-off lands or to bring him knowledge. Irish scholars, sea-captains, men from Jerusalem, India, Rome, from European courts and monasteries, freemen who came on his progresses to complain of the injustice of their lords,—whom he received while he was washing his hands,—bards who brought songs and MSS. from the North, his bishops whom he harried into writing, his Ethelings whom he drove to read enough law to

do their duty as magistrates,—all who had anything new or useful to tell him, were welcomed frankly and talked to as man to man. Yet with this sense of human equality, he was always the ruler, the master who was resolved to do justice, to slay the evil-doer whatever his rank, to secure the state, to make law prevail.

And well he did this work, knowing his time, himself, his foes, and his people. Though he sometimes complained, as it were to himself, of his unquiet life, he was one of those high-hearted men who think themselves fortunate because they are born in evil times. He was still more fortunate in that he had within himself the power to meet them, to endure them when nothing but endurance was possible, to master them when the hour of action arrived. He took his world day by day, as men must do in these national crises, and found himself equal to the moment. If he had not foreseen a difficulty, he invented what was fitting to overcome it. When he conquered it, he took care it should never occur again. What he seized or won, he kept. Nor did he act with violence, or in haste, or without a good-humoured smile for the weakness or waywardness of men. No hard times made him unjust, or cruel, or irritable. He had fierce fighting to do, incessant war for the very life of his kingdom. He suffered sorely from painful and recurring illness. He had to subdue to justice and education a reluctant nobility, an ignorant Church, and a rude people. His foes had no sense of truth and honour. They broke their treaties with a laugh. They were men whose business was plunder, who hated learning, civilisation, and any law and order but their own wild code. Alfred loathed their ways, but he managed them with a certain gentle and masterly tolerance, and made them feel that he was their master. He expected treachery, got it, and quietly bade them behave better for the future. He was a real philosopher of mankind.

So he felt what life was, and was tolerant to humanity—one of

those men who, passing through manifold experiences, mostly sorrowful and hard, emerge at the end more kindly, gentle, and wiser than before. Nor was he without noble consolations. After the valley of the shadow of death, he had some years of green pastures and sweet waters, when he could pursue and try to fulfil the ideals of his youth. His friends were many, and they clung to him. Nothing in his writings is more lovingly dwelt on than the blessing of friendship. He drew even a deeper comfort from the love he gave to his chieftains and his people which made the atmosphere of his soul tender and bright, and from his knowledge of their love for him. Liberty, the woman he loved more than any earthly woman, was with him always like an angel ; and his soul was humble and right with God. We feel these consolations were his, when we read his comments on the book of Boethius. Yet we see also from those comments how sensitive, how delicately wrought was his spirit. There are passages which seem written by one who had suffered in friendship, yet who believed in men. There are passages which record how bitterly he longed for quiet, yet he fought on. There are passages which seem written by a retired philosopher, unfit for rude affairs. Yet he was a great warrior, fighting hand to hand in front of the fray, and in peace a great hunter. He was more than a warrior ; he was a great general, strategist, and master of men. When he appeared in the field, his face was lit like an angel's. The Danes had conquered in battle all who opposed them in Europe. They met more than their match in Alfred. He even beat them on their own element of the sea. When we read of his fighting we think he is unlikely to manage peace. When we read of his pleasure in the affairs of peace, we think he is not likely to manage war. But he managed both excellently well. War was his duty, peace his delight.

Peace and its work of learning, of the arts, of law, was the

ideal of his life. A weaker man, angry with events which prevented his ideal, might have been so wearied with contrary winds and with his own anger, that when peace came he would, in sullenness or exhaustion, not use its opportunities. It was quite the opposite with the king. When the contrary winds ceased to blow, he was like a ship long cabined in harbour, who with joy lets loose her sails, springs from her anchorage,<sup>\*</sup> and with the favouring breeze humming in her cordage and in her captain's heart, flies forth to seek new lands, to fulfil her hopes, and reach her goal. No one else in England had this ideal of a people civilised by law, by education in learning and the arts,—not his brother, not the Thegns, not even the Church ; nor did he succeed in giving it to his sons and grandsons. They let fall from their hands the tools he had made. It was not till nearly a century afterwards that his work was taken up again.

Where did he find this high conception ? It partly grew out of his own genius, a self-created tree. But before it took form it had received divers elements which gave its seed the power to grow. His boyhood had been nurtured by the influence of Rome. The traditions of the aims and work of Charles the Great for the education and civilisation of his empire had fallen into his mind at the court of Charles the Bald ; and these were linked to the past of his own country when Northumbria, as he knew, was at the head of the scholarship of Europe. His boyhood had loved, tradition tells us, the songs of his people, and when he became king he inflamed his ardour for learning and moulded his ideal for his people with the new elements he drew from these ancestral sagas, from the remnants of the glory of Northumbrian letters and arts which filtered through Mercia to his Court, from the learned men who visited him from Ireland and the Continent, till the longing to realise his ideal for Wessex and for England grew into an intensity which it never lost. This is even more remark-

able than his pre-eminence in war and government. In those, many kings have been great, but few have also been great in this as well.

Moreover he gave this ideal of learning a new turn. There has been plenty, he thought, of cloistered learning in the past. What is the good of it unless the people have it? Let the priests master it, and the nobles learn it. Let them know the songs and tales of their land and the history of their people and the world—and then give what they know to the folk, spread learning and the arts over the nation, and bind all men together into unity by this education, as well as by law and love of country. That was Alfred's ideal ; it was only conceived in that age by one other man, by Charles the Great; and it is, even to-day, a thing uncommon among emperors, kings, and governments.

That men should fight steadily was well; that good government should be is well, but Alfred thought that war and government would both be better if knowledge, literature, and the arts were common among the people. They discipline, he thought, the brain, create a soul, instil good manners into a nation. By better brains men win battles more easily, and make better laws. When the powers of the soul are developed, a people obey better, and the law-giver feels more sensitively what a people need. Poetry may give wings to war, and it makes a nation love its land, its customs, homes, and law ; and when the spirit of a people, with Alfred, thinks little of wealth, power, and rank in comparison with the invisible wealth and power of goodness and love, and refers its national life to God—it secures that strong foundation on which it can rest steadfastly in the day of trouble, and graciously in the hour of prosperity. These were Alfred's thoughts, and the after-history of England has shown, both in pursuit and in neglect of his ideal, how right he was.

It was an ideal too far advanced for the time in which he lived. He failed in his effort. But the seed he sowed did not perish ;

abiding its time. In the end, under E<sup>a</sup>'zar and his successors, fruitage came; and for centuries after, even under the Norman oppression, even among the Normans themselves, Alfred's ideal shone like a constant star above the realm of England. It shines still, and England will do well, in times when power and wealth claim a gross authority, to reverence and follow its light.





## ÆLFRED

ÆLFRED, whom men have called the “Great” and the “Truth-teller”; whom the England of the Middle Ages named “England’s Darling”; he who was the Warrior and the Hunter, the Deliverer and the Law-maker, the Singer and the Lover of his people,—“Lord of the harp and liberating spear”—was, above all, for the purposes of this book, the creator and then the father of English prose literature. The learning which had been lost in the North he regained for the South, and York, where the centre of literature had been, was now replaced by Winchester. There, Ælfred in his king’s chamber, and filled with longing to educate his people, wrote and translated hour by hour into the English tongue the books he thought useful for that purpose. They are the origins of English prose.

He was born in 849, at Wantage in Berkshire, the youngest son of Æthelwulf and grandson of the great Ecgberht. At the age of four years the boy saw Rome, voyaging with an embassy to the centre of the world of thought and law. Leo IV. ordained and anointed him as king and received him as his adopted son. Two years later he went thither again with his father, who loved him more than his other sons, and stayed in the city until he was seven years old. The long journey through diverse countries, the vast historic town, its noble architecture, the long tradition of its law and story, its early Christian life, the spiritual power of

the Roman Church, even the temporal power which flowed from it into Charles the Great of whom Ælfred had heard so much, must have made a profound impression, for inspiration and education, on a boy of genius. We can trace some of the results in his after-life. He was never satisfied till he was able to read Latin literature ; he knit the Church of Rome and the crown of Wessex into a close friendship. We know from the *Chronicle* how often he sent embassies and gifts to Rome.

But this was not the only foreign influence which played upon his youth. He lived, on his return from Rome, for three months with Charles the Bald at the Frankish Court. The memory of the intellect and power of Charles the Great still shed, after nearly fifty years, a departing ray over the dying empire, and it shone into the mind of the child. We may be sure that the learned men of the court did not forget to talk with him of the English scholar, Alcuin, who had brought to the kingdoms of Charles the treasures of learning from York. His own country and his own folk had done this great work, and Ælfred never forgot it. When years had passed by, he recalled it in one of his prefaces.

With these new impulses he returned to England, desiring knowledge, but, as afterwards, there was none to teach him. One thing, however, he could do—he could learn the songs and stories of his own people in his own tongue ; and the tale, with all its difficulties, which Asser tells, at least embodies his early love of books and of English verse. As he stood with his brothers at his mother's knee, she read to them out of a book of English songs. Æthelstan and Æthelred had no care for book or poetry, but Ælfred, delighted by the beauty of the illuminated letters, eagerly turned over the pages. “Whoever of you first learns the songs,” said the Queen, “shall have the book,” and Ælfred had no rest till he won the prize. The love of his native literature never left him. Night and day, we are told, he was eager to learn the “Saxon songs,” and in after-life one of his chief pleasures was to recite English songs, to hear the

singers of the court declaim them, to collect Saxon poems, to teach them to his children, to get his nobles to care for them, and to have them taught in his schools. He knew the English sagas, and the heroic names. He mentions Weland, the mighty smith; he told Asser the story of Offa's daughter Eadburga, a tale which was imported into Mercian history from the legend of Offa of the ancient Engle-land; and he recorded, with added touches of personal interest, the story of the first poet of England.

It may be imagined, then, with what bitter sorrow he heard at the age of eighteen, in 867, that there was not one religious house from the Tyne to the Humber which was not ravaged and burnt by the heathen; that not one trace, save perhaps in York and in a few abbeys north of the Tyne, was left of the learning and libraries of Northumbria. And his sorrow would be still more bitter when in 869 the rich abbeys of East Anglia were destroyed by the pirates Ivar and Hubba, and Wessex, his own land, lay open to the ravager. Guthrum or Gorm led this new attack, and the long-gathered wrath of the patriot and the lover of learning whetted Ælfred's sword when, on the height of Ashdown, around the stunted and lonely thorn-tree, he and his brother Æthelred made their final charge and beat the invaders down the hill with a pitiless slaughter. In the battles that followed Æthelred was wounded to death, and in 871 Alfred, now twenty-two years old, became the king.

The first years of his reign were dark as the night. Wessex barely held to life; Mercia was a desolation; all the seats of learning in Bernicia were now ruined, and at the beginning of 878 the Danes were in the heart of Wessex, apparent conquerors. But Ælfred was greatest when all seemed lost. He refuged himself at Athelney (the *Æthelings'* isle) a hill, defended by morass and forest, at the confluence of the Parret with the Frome, among the deep-watered marshes of Somersetshire. It is here that legend places the scene of the cowherd's hut and Ælfred watching and forgetting the burning loaves; and it was here that

the famous jewel of gold and enamel was found, with the inscription—"Ælfred bade me to be wrought." There he sat for three, perhaps for seven months, gathering a host ; and broke forth from his solitudes in the spring of 878, attacked the Danish army at Ethandun, drove them to their camp, forced their surrender in a fortnight, and dragged from them the peace of Wedmore. That peace, in spite of the later struggle of 885-886, settled England. It broke the advance of the Danes and weakened their power in England and abroad. It left Wessex and Kent in the hands of Ælfred ; it secured for the English that part of Mercia which was west of Watling Street—from the Ribble to the Severn valley and to the upper valley of the Thames. The rest of England from the Tees to the Thames, including London (which Ælfred, however, got in 886), was in the power of the Danes and is called the Danelaw.

Over the Danelaw—to interrupt for a moment the tale of Ælfred—Danish customs, religion, and commerce prevailed ; the Danish sagas were sung, and the Danish spirit grew. One would think that these folk, especially when they became Christian, would have left some traces of their keen individuality on the poetry or prose of the Danelaw. The stories of Horn and Havelok, rooted in Danish and Celtic traditions, were taken up by the Anglo-Norman, and then by Middle-English poets. There are, moreover, a few Danish legends in Layamon's poem. But now, and after the Norman Conquest, there is nothing but place-names and folk-tales to show us that more than half, and in after-years, the whole, of England belonged to Danish kings and to Danish folk. But the Danes who took England were scarcely a nation ; when they settled down they became part of the English people and absorbed their ways. And they did this the more easily because they were of the same race and tongue as the men they conquered. Christianity also knit them to the English who made them Christians. With the loss of their wild gods half their individuality fled away. The land also and its scenery had their assimilating power on the new indwellers.

When Ælfred was forced to leave the Danelaw in Danish hands, he little thought that he was making Englishmen.

But at present the English and the Danes were two, not one ; and Ælfred had to keep the English elements uppermost. It was well then, having this stern work at hand, that he was not only the student and the singer, but also a great warrior, and active in all bodily exercises. He was a keen hunter, falconer, rider, and slayer of wild beasts. “ Every act of Venery,” says Asser, “ was known and practised by him better than by others.” No man was bolder in the fight, none more watchful in the camp or wiser in the council. His people who fought along with him hailed him with joy. His look shone, it is said, like that of a shining angel in the battle. At Ashdown, “ he charged again and again like a wild boar,” and the slow gathering, knitting together, and inspiration of his men when he lay hid like a lion at Athelney and sprang forth, roaring, to overwhelm his foes, shows that his prudence, skill, and mastery of the art of war were as great as his personal courage.

When Ælfred had thus won peace for his people, he wished to educate them. But he had at first something more needful to do ; and he spent the six years of quiet from 878 to 884 in repairing the ruin made by the Danes, in reforming the army, in building a navy, and in establishing just government and law. The peace was broken in 885 by a fresh attack of the Northmen, but was again secured in the following year. Ælfred was now complete master, not only of his kingdom, but also of the national imagination. “ In that year,” says the *Chronicle*, “ all the Angel-cyn turned to Ælfred, except those in bondage to Danish men.” In the following year he began, with his mingled humility, good sense and self-confidence, that revival of learning which he had so long desired. The foundation for this great purpose had already been partly laid. He had collected, and continued to collect, around him a number of scholars who should be, first, his teachers ; and afterwards enable him to teach the English people in the English language what they ought to know as citizens of a

great country, and as pilgrims to a heavenly country. He called to this work Werfrith, Bishop of Worcester, who himself presided over the school in that town; Denewulf of Winchester; Plegmund, whom he drew from Mercia to make Archbishop of Canterbury; two Mercian priests, Æthelstan and Werwulf, who were his chaplains and teachers (all three children of the college at Worcester); and these exhausted all that England could do for him. In this penury he turned to foreign lands for help. "Men once came," he said, "from out-land countries to seek instruction in England; now if we need it we can only get it abroad." So he called Grimbald from Flanders and put him over the new abbey rising at Winchester, and John the Old Saxon from the monastery of Corvœi in Westphalia to preside over the religious house his gratitude had dedicated to God at Athelney.

His incessant spirit kept these men up to their work. He translated books such as Gregory's *Pastoral Care* to teach the clergy their duties; he urged the bishops to give their leisure to literature, and urged it as a religious duty. He gave them books to translate and insisted on their being finished. He may be said to have driven them to write, as much as he drove the judges to learn the duties of their office and the Laws of England.

The difficulties he had with the clergy were much greater with the nobles. The English warriors and courtiers of mature age were sorely troubled when the king compelled them to learn to read and write, or if they could not learn, to hire a freeman or slave to recite before them at fixed times the books needful for their duties. When at last he despaired of the elder men, he sent all the young nobility and many who were not noble into the schools where his own children were educated, that they might learn how to read both English and Latin books, and to translate the one language into the other. But this was afterwards. To teach himself now was his first business, and Æthelstan and Werwulf, his daily tutors, were not enough for him. He needed a better scholar and one whom he could love as a friend. So he

asked Asser of St. David's, in the farthest border of Wales, to live and study with him. Asser saw the king at Dene, near Chichester, in the early part of the year 884, and stayed three days with him. "Stay with me always," said the king, and when Asser objected his love of Wales and his duties there, the king replied, "Stay with me at least six months in the year." A fever kept Asser away for more than a year, but in July 886 he came to Leonaford, and remained eight months at the court. It is probable that then he went back slowly to Wales, and returned to Ælfred in the middle of the year 887. From that time he seems to have spent six months every year with the king. Then Ælfred's close study began. "I translated and read to him," writes Asser, "whatever books he wished, for it was his custom day and night, amid all his afflictions of mind and body, either to read books or have them read to him." Thus he learned Latin, and the first result of this association with Asser was Ælfred's *Handbook*. One day Asser quoted to him a phrase he liked out of some Latin author. "Write it down for me," said the king, and he pulled out of his breast a little note-book. The book was full, and Asser proposed to begin a new book of quotations, which as the king made he then translated into English. The new book grew till it became almost as large as a Psalter; and he called it his *Handbook*, finding no small comfort therein. This *Handbook* was his first work, and he was thirty-five years old when he began it. It consisted of extracts from the Bible and the Fathers, and of a few scattered illustrations made of these passages by Ælfred or Asser—"divinorum testimoniorum scientiam —multimodos divinae scripturae flosculos... congregavit." "Quos flosculos undecunque collectos," is afterwards said of this book. William of Malmesbury has two extracts from this Manual. Both have to do with the earlier history of England and of Ælfred's own house, but it is exceeding improbable, as some have argued from these quotations, that there was any history of Wessex in the *Handbook*. "These passages are most likely only allusions or illustrations which crept into this book of religious extracts.

Else William of Malmesbury would have used the whole book.” This remark of Wülker’s seems to settle the matter. This *Handbook*, begun in Nov. 887, was fully set forth in English in 888 for the use of the people. It is a great misfortune that it is lost.

The next piece of writing he did was the *Law-book*. He compiled it out of the existing Codes of Kent, Wessex, and Mercia, that is, out of the laws of Æthelberht, Ine, and Offa. It had an introduction, followed by three parts—(1) Ælfred’s Laws ; (2) Ine’s Laws ; (3) Ælfred’s and Guthrum’s Peace ; and it was composed, said William of Malmesbury, “inter fremitus armorum et stridores lituorum.” This suggests that the collation of the laws had been begun in 885 or 886. The introduction begins with the Decalogue of the second Nicæan Council and some words on the Mosaic laws. Ælfred adds the letter sent by the Apostles to the Church after the Council at Jerusalem. Then he quotes—“Whosoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them ; for this is the law and the prophets.” He tells every judge in the kingdom that “Judge so as ye would be judged” is the foundation of their duty. As to the laws, he did not make many of his own, but kept and rejected out of the above codes those which by the counsel of his Witan he thought best for his kingdom ; clinging like an Englishman to precedent. The whole book, since the Scriptural quotations in the preface suggest that it came after the *Handbook*, was probably issued in 888.

By this time he was fairly well acquainted with Latin, and as the most necessary class to benefit were the clergy, the instructors of the people, he chose as the first book to be translated the *Cura Pastoralis*—the “Herdsman’s Book”—of Gregory the Great, a kind of manual of the duties of the clergy. It recites in four divisions the ideal of a Christian priest ; and the king took care that a copy of it should be sent “to every bishop’s seat in my kingdom.” A copy was sent, as mentioned specially in Ælfred’s preface, to Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury. Plegmund

was first made Archbishop in 890. The translation then was probably done in 889, and sent to the bishops in 890.<sup>1</sup>

That this was his first book is maintained by some critics, who support their view by arguments drawn from the well-known preface which Ælfred prefixed to it. I do not understand how, after reading that preface, a number of other critics refer the book to a much later period in Ælfred's life. Almost every paragraph suggests the beginning not the end of his translating work. It is also not likely that after the small effort of the *Handbook* he would undertake so long and difficult a business as either the translation of Orosius, or of Bæda's history, or of Boethius. The book is also done with more closeness to his author than any other of his translations, and no clearly original matter is inserted. He certainly paraphrases, omits, expands, explains, and changes the place of his text, where he is anxious to make things clear for his people, but he does this briefly, tentatively, and less than elsewhere. The book is the book of a beginner. In it, however, English literary prose may be said to have made its first step. Bæda's translation of St. John's gospel, that portion also of the English Chronicle which already existed up to the death of Æthelwulf, can scarcely be called literary prose. As we think, then, of the king, seated with Asser or Plegmund in his bower at Winchester or Dene, and bending over the Herdsman's book of Gregory, we think also of all the great prose of England, the fountain of whose stream arose in these quiet hours of more than royal labour. It is well, though the preface is long, to quote it in full. It is the first piece of any importance we possess of English prose. It is redolent of Ælfred's character and spirit. It marks the state of English literature at the time it was written. It makes us realise how great was the work Ælfred did for literature and the difficulties with which he had to contend.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are many different arrangements made by critics of the dates of Ælfred's translations. I have adopted the arrangement I think the best.

<sup>2</sup> For the text of this preface, see Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, pp. 47.

*This Book is for Worcester*

King Ælfred biddeth greet Bishop Wærferð with loving and friendly words, and I let it be known to thee that it has come very often into my mind what wise men there formerly were both among the clergy and the laymen, and what happy times there were then throughout England ; and how the kings who had rule over the people (in those days) obeyed God and his ministers, and they kept peace, law and order at home, and also spread their lands abroad ; and how it was well with them both in war and in wisdom ; and also how keen were the clergy about both teaching and learning and all the services they owed to God, and how men from abroad sought wisdom and teaching hither in (our) land, and how we must now get them from without if we would have them. So utterly had it (learning) fallen away in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their service-books in English, or even put a letter from Latin into English ; and I think there were not many beyond the Humber. So few there were of them that I cannot think of even one when I came to the throne. Thanks be to God Almighty that we now have any supply of teachers. And therefore I bid thee do, as I believe thou art willing to do,—free thyself from the things of this world as often as thou canst that thou mayst put to work the wisdom that God has given thee wherever thou canst. Think what punishments have come upon us in the sight of the world when we neither loved it (wisdom) ourselves, nor let other men have it. We only loved to have the name of Christian, and (to have) very few (Christian) virtues.

When I remembered all this, I remembered also how I saw (before it was all harried and burned), how the churches over all England stood filled with treasures and books, and also a great host of God's servants ; and at that time they knew very little use for those books, because they could not understand anything of them, for they were not written in their own language. It was as if they said : "Our forefathers, who held these places before us, loved wisdom, and through it they got wealth and left it to us." Here one can still see their footprints, but we cannot follow them because we have lost both the wealth and the wisdom, since we would not bend our heart to follow their spoor.

When I remembered all this then I wondered exceedingly about the good and wise men who were formerly throughout England, and who had fully learned the books—that they did not not wish to turn any part of them into their own tongue. But I soon answered myself and said : They did not look for it that men would ever be so careless, and that learning would so fall away. For this desire they left it alone :—wishing that there should be the more wisdom here in the land the more we knew of languages.

Then I remembered how the Law was first given in the Hebrew tongue, and again, how when the Greeks learned it, they turned it all into their own tongue, and also all other books. And again, how the Romans did the same. When they had learned it they turned all of it by wise translators into their own tongue. And also all other Christian peoples turned some part of (the old) books into their own tongue. Therefore it seemeth better to me, if it seemeth so to you, that we also turn some books—those which are most needful for men to know—into the tongue which we can all understand, and that ye make means—as we very easily can do, with God's help, if we have stillness—that all the youth now in England of free men who have the wealth to be able to set themselves to it be put to learning while they are not of use for anything else, until the time when they can well read English writing; but those whom one wishes to teach further, and to forward to a higher place—let them afterwards be taught further in the Latin tongue.

When I remembered how the knowledge of the Latin tongue had before this fallen away throughout England, and yet that many could read English writing—then I began amidst other divers and manifold occupations of this kingdom to turn into English the book which in Latin is named *Pastoralis*, and in English *Shepherd's Book*; sometimes word for word, sometimes meaning for meaning, as I had learned it from Plegmund, my archbishop, and Asser, my bishop, and from Grimbald, my mass-priest, and from John, my mass-priest. When I had learned it so that I understood it, and so that I could quite clearly give its meaning, I turned it into English. And to each bishopric in my Kingdom I will send one, and in each there shall be an “æstel” (*indicatorium*) worth fifty mancuses. And I command, in God's name, that no one take the “æstel” from the book nor the book from the minister; it is unknown how long there may be such learned bishops, as now, God be thanked, are nearly everywhere. Therefore I would that they should be always kept in that place, except the bishop wish to have the book with him, or it be lent out anywhere, or any one be making a copy from it.

This ends the Preface. Then, after a short space, some alliterative lines follow. They tell us that “this message (Gregory's treatise) Augustine brought over the salt sea to the island-dwellers, as the Pope of Rome, that warrior of the Lord, had decreed. In many a Right-spell the wise Gregory was versed. . . . Afterwards, King Ælfred turned every word of me into English and sent me south and north to his scribes to be copied that he might send these copies to his Bishops,

because some who least knew the Latin tongue were in need of them."

The translation follows, and at the end Ælfred has added some verses of his own. They have a faint touch of imagination ; their simplicity reveals his childlikeness ; their rudeness of form and phrase belongs to one who had but begun to write, but they mark his interest in English poetry. He who loves poetry will try to write poetry.

These are the waters — I paraphrase the verses — which the God of Hosts promised, for our comfort, to us dwellers on the earth ; and His will is that from all who truly believe in Him these ever-living waters should flow into the world ; and their well-spring is the Holy Ghost. . . . Some shut up this stream of wisdom in their mind, so that it flows not everywhere in vain ; but the well abides in the breast of the man, deep and still. Some let it run away in rills over the land ; and it is not wise that such bright water should, noisy and shallow, be flowing over the land till it become a fen.

But now, draw near to drink it, for Gregory has brought to your doors the well of the Lord. Whoever have brought here a water-tight pitcher, let him fill it now ; and let him come soon again. Whoever have a leaky pitcher, let him mend it, lest he spill the sheenest of waters, and lose the drink of life.

The second book Ælfred translated (890-91) was Bæda's *Ecclesiastical History of the English*, and this was addressed not only to the clergy but also to the laity, who ought to know the history of their own land. This translation also clings closely to its original, but omits many chapters not likely to interest the ordinary reader—letters from the Pope, theological disquisitions, the account of the Easter controversy, and some purely Northumbrian affairs. But Ælfred takes pains, as if it were a subject of national interest, to translate in full the story of the origin of English poetry. It is a pity, but it is characteristic of his early translating, that he inserts no original matter. No one could have given a better account of the history of the Church in Wessex and of the kingdom ; and this is precisely the point where Bæda is weak and less accurate than usual. That Ælfred did not do this is

probably owing to the fact that about the year 891 he had begun to work the *Chronicle* up into a national history, and saw no need to put forth two accounts of the same matters. The loss is indeed all but repaired in his editing of the English Chronicle. That this editing came after his translation of Bæda is at least suggested by the repetition in the *Chronicle* of certain mistakes he made in that translation. Moreover, the king might naturally feel that history should follow history.

It was the habit of the monasteries to put down on the *Easter Tables* the briefest and driest records of the events of the year, chiefly the deaths and enthronements of bishops and kings. For Wessex and Kent this would be done at Winchester and Canterbury, but it is plain the Roll would be most carefully kept at Winchester. Professor Earle has skilfully wrought out when the various recensions were made before the reign of Ælfred. It is enough for our purpose to say that at the time of Æthelwulf or shortly after his death, some one man, and probably Bishop Swithun of Winchester, filled up the Winchester Annals from tradition back to Hengest, combined them with the Canterbury Chronicle, made a genealogy of the West Saxon kings from Æthelwulf to Cerdic, from Cerdic to Woden, and from Woden to Adam; and then, having inserted new matter throughout, told at some length the wars and death of Æthelwulf. This part of the *Chronicle*, running to 855, was found by Ælfred on his accession and remained as it was till the days of peace. Then about 891, having conceived the notion of making it a national history, he caused the whole to be gone over, and the part from the accession of his brother Æthelred, with a full account of his own wars with the Danes, to be written in. It is, from its style, the work of one man, and it may be that Ælfred did it himself. As historical prose it is rude, but also condensed and vigorous.<sup>1</sup> In this recension many fresh entries were made from the Latin writers and Bæda's history. This then is the manuscript of the *Annals of*

<sup>1</sup> Some think that the first part, from 60 B.C. to A.D. 755, was not done at Æthelwulf's death, but now.

*Winchester* which, written by a single hand, was presented by Archbishop Parker to Corpus Christi College at Cambridge ; and it is the source of the historical prose of England.<sup>1</sup>

The new book Ælfred now translated,<sup>2</sup> most probably in the years 891 to 893, was the *History of the World* by Orosius, a book written originally in the year 418, at the suggestion of Augustine, and with the purpose of proving, as Augustine himself tried to do in the third book of his *Civitas Dei*, that the wars of the world and the decay of the Roman Empire were not due, as the heathen declared, to Christianity. Though a poor work, it became a standard authority. It was the only book which the Middle Ages read as a universal history. Ælfred, knowing its value in education, and anxious to inform his people not only of the history of England but also of the world beyond, gave them this book in their native tongue. He left out all the controversial part, and all that he thought would be of no use or pleasure to his readers. On the other hand, he inserted a number of new facts, interspersed with original remarks full of his inquiring and eager intelligence. But the chief insertion he made, in a clear and simple style, was a full account of the geography of Germany and of the places where the English tongue had of old been spoken. “It bears traces, in its use, for example, of Ostsä, instead of the Anglo-Saxon Eastsä, of being derived from German sources.” Indeed, the king made inquiries of every traveller who came to Wessex, and when he heard of two in particular who had made long sea-voyages, Ohthere and Wulf-

<sup>1</sup> Ælfred's work on the *Chronicle* ceases in 891. In 894 a writer of ability and force took up the task, and carried it on to 897. From that date to 910 the book was neglected. In 910 it was again undertaken by an excellent writer.

<sup>2</sup> Not only does Wm. of Malmesbury mention the book as Ælfred's, but the following allusion can only be to the history by Orosius :--

Il [Ælfred] fist escrivere un livre Engleis  
Des aventures e des leis  
E de batailles de la terre

E des reis ki firent la guere  
E maint livre fist il escrivere  
U li bon clerc vont sovent lire.

stan, he had them up to his house, and while he sat at his desk, made them dictate to him their travels along the coasts of Norway and the German shores of the Baltic. "Ohthere," it begins, "said to his Lord King Ælfred, that of all the Northmen he dwelt the farthest north," and he told how he had sailed along the coast of Norway till he reached the White Sea and the mouth of the Dwina; and then of another voyage past Denmark and the islands till he saw the Baltic running many hundred miles up into the land. "He had passed by," says the king, "before he came to Haithaby, Jutland, Zealand, and other islands on his right, where the Engle dwelt before they came hither." Wulfstan then told his tale—how he had sailed from Haithaby along the northern shores of Germany for seven days and nights until he reached the mouths of the Vistula and the land of the Esthonians, of whose country and customs he gives an account which must have delighted the keen curiosity of the king. I give a short extract from Ohthere's voyage in order to show Ælfred's hand.

Ohthere told his lord, King Ælfred, that he, of all northmen, dwelt the farthest north. He said that he dwelt in that northward land by the West Sea. That land, he said, is very long from there to the north, but it is all waste except in a few places. Here and there the Finns dwell in it, hunting in winter and fishing in summer, along the sea. He said that once he longed to try how far that land stretched to the north, or whether any one dwelt north of the waste. So he went due north along the land, the waste land on the starboard, the open sea on the larboard, for three days. Then the land bent right to the east, or the sea in on the land, he knew not which, but he knew that he awaited there a north-west wind and sailed then east, along by the land, as far as he could sail in four days. Then he had to wait for a wind right from the north, because the land bent due south. Then he sailed thence due south along the land as far as he could sail in five days. Then there flowed a great stream up into the land, and they turned up into the stream, because they durst not sail past it because of foes, for on the other side of the stream the land was all inhabited. Nor had he before met any inhabited land since he had set out from his own home. . . . Chiefly he went thither, in addition to the viewing of the land, for the horse-whales (walrus), because they had very excellent bone in their teeth,—some of their teeth they brought to the king—and their hide is very good for ship-ropes. That whale is much

smaller than other whales ; it is not longer than seven ells. But in his own land is the best whale-hunting. They are forty-eight ells long, and the greatest fifty. Of those, he said, he was one of six who slew sixty (?) in two days.

There is a freshness as of a sea-voyage, a personal breath in the simple writing which makes us realise how closely Ælfred listened to these rough seafarers, and how much he sympathised with their spirit of discovery. This is the first record in English of the mighty roll of great adventurers upon the ocean, and Ælfred was as eager to secure the geographical and national knowledge of these men as the Geographical Society would be to-day.

These translations were the work of about five years, from 888 to 893, years of the “stillness” that Ælfred loved, years when he nourished in the arts of peace and literature, as he had done in wars and government, that “desire I have to leave to men who should live after me a memory of me in good deeds.” I have said that it is probable that during this time he received and collected the Northumbrian poetry. Bæda’s account of Cædmon would have set him to inquire about it. Its translation into the West Saxon dialect would follow, and I should like to have seen Ælfred reading *Beowulf* for the first time, or Asser and Ælfred reading together the *Crist* of Cynewulf. Nor did literature alone engage him. He still sang and listened to English song, but he cared also for things and men beyond England. He kept open house for all who brought him outlanders’ tales ; he received pagan Danes, Britons from Wales, Scots, Armoricans, voyagers from Gaul and Germany and Rome, messengers from Jerusalem and the far East. Irish scholars came to confer with him,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We find in the *English Chronicle*, under the year 891-892, the following romantic entry, part of which reads like a myth—like the voyage of St. Brandan—but which is in full accordance with Celtic love of adventure :—“And three Scots came to King Ælfred in a boat without oars from Hibernia” (Yrlande in another MS.), “whence they had stolen away, because, for the love of God, they would be on pilgrimage—they recked not where. The boat in which they fared was wrought of three hides and a half, and they took with them enough meat for seven nights. Then after seven nights they

and we hear that he sent a messenger to visit the Christian Churches in India. The arts also were not neglected. He restored and developed the art of shipbuilding. He fetched many architects from the continent, and was himself an architect. He rebuilt the fortresses ; he rebuilt London into a goodly city. He made new roads and repaired the old. He adorned and laid with fair stone his royal country-houses. In his reign enamel work, gold-weaving and gold-smithery flourished, and certain mechanical inventions were his amusement. He still hunted ; it is a tradition that he wrote a book on falconry ; and the forest and the pools saw the king flying his royal birds and chasing the boar and the stag with the eagerness but not the strength of a young man. Through all this lighter work he pursued the heavier work of ruling his kingdom and preparing it for war, and in his translation of Boethius there is a statement inserted of the powers and means of Government, of the division into classes a great king makes of his people for the sake of the kingdom, of the necessity laid upon him to use this material nobly. It is worth reading, not only for the insight it gives into his kingship, but for the personal touches of sentiment which give it a literary charm.

Reason ! indeed thou knowest that neither greed nor the power of this earthly kingdom was ever very pleasing to me, neither yearned I at all exceedingly after this earthly kingdom. But yet indeed I wished for material for the work which it was bidden me to do, so that I might guide and order with honour and fitness the power with which I was trusted. Indeed thou knowest that no man can show forth any craft ; can order, or guide any power, without tools or material—material, that is, for each craft, without which a man cannot work at that craft. This is then the material of a king and his tools, wherewith to rule—That he have his land fully manned, that he have prayermen, and army-men, and workmen. Indeed, thou knowest that without these tools no king can show forth his craft. This also is his material—That he have, with the tools, means of living for the three classes

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came to land in Cornwall and went then straightway to King Ælfred. Thus were they named—Dubslane, Macbethu, and Maelinnum. And Swifnæh, the best teacher that was among the Scots, died.”

—land to dwell upon, and gifts, and weapons, and meat, and ale, and clothes, and what else the three classes need. . . .

And this is the reason I wished for material wherewith to order (my) power, in order that my skill and power should not be forgotten and hidden away, for every work and every power shall soon grow very old and be passed over silently, if it be without wisdom; because whatsoever is done through foolishness no one can ever call work. Now would I say briefly that I have wished to live worthily while I lived, and after my life to leave to men who should come after me my memory in good deeds.

These were his happiest days, but he lived, as he said, “with a naked sword always hanging over his head by a single thread,” and his quiet was destroyed when the sword fell in 893. “Hardship and sorrow a king would wish to be without, but this is not a king’s doom”; and the sorrow came when the pirates from Boulogne, with 250 vessels in their train, seized on the forest of Andred, and Hasting, with 80 vessels, pushed his way up the Thames. In 894 Hasting got into Hampshire, and shortly after the whole of the Danelaw rose and joined the invaders. It was their dying effort. Ælfred was well prepared, and the war, though carried to Chester in the North and to Exeter in the South, was victoriously finished by the capture of the Danish fleet in 897. From that date till his death in 901 Ælfred had peace; and he returned, worn out but a conqueror, to his literary work.

The book he now undertook was Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. The translation, with its original handling of the material, points to one who now had become an expert in translation, who boldly transferred himself into the soul of his author. This self-confidence is that of a long practice in translating, and places the book at the end of Ælfred’s life in the years 897 and 898. His choice this time was directed not so much by a desire to teach his people as by personal feeling. The philosophic consolation of the book, to which Ælfred added his own profound Christianity, was in harmony with the temper of a man who had seen how fleeting were wealth and power, bodily strength and fame; and who needed and loved to have a deep religious foundation in the soul. He

had known sore trouble, his life had been a long battle with foes, with national ignorance and stupidity, and with bodily disease ; and now, in this book which he made his own, he mused, full of courage and of weariness, from his watch-tower of quiet, on the tragic and changing world, on the rest of the world to come, and on the power God had given him to act for his kingdom and endure for his people. The preface which I here give may have been dictated by Ælfred himself.

King Ælfred was the translator of this book, and turned it from Latin into English as it is now done. Sometimes he set down word for word, sometimes meaning for meaning, as he could translate most plainly and clearly, in spite of the various and manifold worldly cares which often occupied him in mind and body. These cares, which in his days came on the kingship he had undertaken, are very hard for us to number. And yet, when he had learned this book and turned it from Latin into the English tongue, he then wrought it afterwards into verse, as it is now done. And now he begs, and for God's sake prays every one whom it may please to read the book, that he pray for him, and that he blame him not if he understood it more rightly than he (the king) could. For every one, according to the measure of his understanding and leisure, must speak what he speaketh and do what he doeth.

The *De Consolatione* was written by Boethius in the prison where Theodoric, King of the East Goths, had laid him on a charge of conspiracy. Composed to comfort his heart in trouble, it is a dialogue between him and Philosophy, who consoles him for the evil changes of fortune by proving that the only lasting happiness is in the soul. Inward virtue is all ; everything else is indifferent. The wise and virtuous man is master of himself and of events. The book is the last effort of the heathen philosophy, and so near to a part of the spirit of Christianity that it may be called the bridge between dying paganism and living Christianity. And so much was this the case that the Middle Ages believed Boethius to be a Christian, and his book was translated into the main European languages. Ælfred made it popular in England, Chaucer got it into prose in the fourteenth century ; in the fifteenth it was put into English verse ; under Elizabeth it was again put into English prose.

Its serious and sorrowful note harmonised well with the spiritual life of Ælfred. He expands, but does not improve, the grave ethical paragraphs. He does not wear the stoic robes with grace. "Sometimes, leaving his original aside, he writes out of his own heart, and these passages are for the most part engaged with that contempt of wealth and luxury and power which the long harassment of his life had bred in him. He claims adversity as his friend, not his foe; and he speaks of wisdom and friendship with an equal love. He adds to Boethius a deep religious fervour. The prayers are the writings where he reaches most beauty of expression. The sentences on the Divine nature, steeped in reverence, awe and love, soar with ease into that solemn thought and adoration which we may well believe filled the silent hours of the king's meditation on his own stormy life and on the peace of God. It is a contrast, as we have seen in Cynewulf, which was dear to the English writers. Sometimes he yields himself to the charm of metaphysics, and discusses free will and the Divine preordination. In the fifth book, where these excursions come, he puts his own work almost entirely in place of his original, and explains the problems of Boethius from the Christian point of view. Nowhere does Ælfred stand more clearly before us, and the clearer he is the nobler he seems. As we read, our admiration of him as king and warrior and law-giver is mingled with our pity and reverence. And the pity is that tender pity which men feel for the veteran who has laid by, sore wounded, sword and shield; and for whom pity is another word for love. It is now that the phrase—England's Shepherd, England's Darling—may most justly be on our lips. The prayer at the end of the book fitly closes a work he loved to do, and reveals so intimately the man's heart, that we feel he could never have published anything so personal had he not felt that his people loved him dearly and were at one with him.

I have said that we get close to Ælfred's inner life in the additions he makes, with great freedom, to this translation of

the *De Consolatione*. It seems worth our while to isolate a few of these additions. They reveal him as man and king, but chiefly as one who had thought all his life long on the temper of mind and spirit which should rule over the doings of a king. In the passage already quoted concerning the organisation of the kingdom, he speaks directly to his subject. In these that follow, on wealth and power and wisdom, there is no direct reference to his kingship, but we feel that he is thinking while he writes of his high place and its temptations; and his nobleness and humility, his deep sense of duty, his apartness from the baser elements of the world, appear in every line.

Riches are better given than withheld. No man can have them without making his fellowmen poorer. A good name is better than wealth. It opens the hollow of the heart; it pierces through hearts that are closed. It is not lessened as it goes from heart to heart among men. No sword can slay it, no rope can bind it.

The goods of life are good through the goodness of the man who has them, and he is good through God. The goods of life are bad through the badness of the man who has them.

True friends are, of all the goods in this world, the most precious. It is God who unites friends. Indeed they are not of this world, but divine. Evil fortune cannot bring them nor take them away.

Wisdom hath four virtues—prudence, temperance, courage, and righteousness. If thou wouldest build Wisdom, set it not up on covetousness. No man builds his house on sandhills. As the drinking sand swallows the river, so covetousness swallows the frail bliss of this world, because it will always be thirsty.

He that will have eternal riches, let him build the house of his mind on the footstone of lowliness. Not on the highest hill where the raging wind of trouble blows or the rain of measureless anxiety.

Power is never a good unless he be good who has it. No one need care for power or strive for it. If you be wise and good, it will follow you, though you may not desire it. Thou shalt not obtain [and here he thinks of all he has borne as king] power free from sorrow from other peoples, nor yet from thine own people and kindred.

Never without fear, difficulties, and sorrows, has a king wealth and power. To be without them, and yet have them, were happy. But I know that cannot be.

But whatsoever trouble beset a king, he would care only to rule over

a free people. [*In a discussion on Free Will, Reason says:*] “How would it look to you if there were any powerful king and he had no free men in his kingdom, but that all were slaves?”

Ælfred: “It would not be thought by me right or reasonable if enslaved men should only attend on him.”

“Then,” quoth Reason, “it would be more unnatural if God, in all His kingdom, had no free creature under His power.”

Proud and unrighteous kings are adorned with gold and swords and thegns; but strip them of their trappings, and they are no more, even worse, than many of their thegns. Let them fall from power, and their past luxury makes them angry with their present, weak through sadness, useless for getting back what they have lost.

This sentence, shortened from the original, reads as if he were thinking of Athelney. Then, having disposed of wealth and power as making a man, he passes on to rank.

“Art thou,” he says, “more fair for other men’s fairness? A man will not be the better because he had a well-born father, if he himself is nought. The only thing which is good in noble descent is this—That it makes men ashamed of being worse than their elders, and strive to do better than they.”

Two more phrases mark the man—

We underworth ourselves when we love that which is lower than ourselves.

For me, I dread no ill weirds. They can neither help nor harm a man. Ill luck is even happiness, though we do not think it is. One can trust it; what it promises is true.

What a pathetic note sounds through all these sentences! It is the note of one who is almost overpowered by difficulty, alone within, with few friends, sore troubled with disease—of one who works for justice and peace in his kingdom with inadequate helpers, but who at every point just conquers life; having his ideal aims and faithful always to them; and having, beyond the storms of the world, a sure faith in the greater King. We do not dwell in a history of literature on the religion of a man, but no account of Ælfred could be true which did not say that he rested on God for his support and inspiration, that his incessant work in this world was combined at every point

with the life of his spirit in the diviner world. I quote one passage out of many to emphasise this, and in itself it is a piece of literature. It is the prayer at the end of the *Boethius* :—

Lord God Almighty, shaper and ruler of all creatures, I pray thee for thy great mercy, and for the token of the holy rood, and for the maidenhood of St. Mary, and for the obedience of St. Michael, and for all the love of thy holy saints and their worthiness, that thou guide me better than I have done towards thee. And guide me to thy will to the need of my soul better than I can myself. And steadfast my mind towards thy will and to my soul's need. And strengthen me against the temptations of the devil, and put far from me foul lust and every unrighteousness. And shield me against my foes, seen and unseen. And teach me to do thy will, that I may inwardly love thee before all things with a clean mind and clean body. For thou art my maker and my redeemer, my help, my comfort, my trust, and my hope. Praise and glory be to thee now, ever and ever, world without end. Amen.

In the *De Consolatione*, Boethius interspersed his prose with verses, with *Metra*. The prefaces of our two English manuscripts tell us that the king, having translated the *Metra* in prose, put them afterwards into poetry, and the oldest of the manuscripts has this poetical version of the *Metra*. Some think we have here the king's work. If we take the short poetical prologue to be a true statement<sup>1</sup>—and indeed it might be the king's own writing—the English versification of the *Metra* is his own. If so he was only a poor versifier. But others say that these verses were done from Ælfred's prose by a writer of the age of the manuscript, that is, of the tenth century. The question has been argued at great length by a crowd of critics, and remains as yet undecided. The argument does not seem worth the trouble. The *Metra* in English verse are not good poetry. It is a pity, if Ælfred wrote them, to connect them with his name. If he did

<sup>1</sup> Here are the first verses of the prologue—

Thus Ælfred us an old-spell told,  
Set forth his song-craft, used a maker's skill,  
King of West Saxons he ! And mickle lust he had  
For this his folk to sing his song,  
And mirth for men and sayings manifold !

A fragment of a third MS. has been lately found by Prof. Napier.

not write them, it would be well if they could be forgotten. Yet the personal touches in them, if we could be sure of Ælfred's authorship, are interesting ; moreover, though one does not care for the poetry, yet, were it Ælfred's, it would illustrate his intellectual activity that he should attempt verse as well as prose.

What else the king did before his death is not quite clear. A translation of the *Soliloquia* of St. Augustine has been imputed to him, and is very probably his. There is a preface, which, if this book belong to the end of Ælfred's life, is a pathetic farewell to all that he has done as a translator of good books for his people, and a call to his fellow-workers to continue his labours for the sake of their English brethren. This is put in the form of a parable ;<sup>1</sup> and its personal feeling and imaginative form—the first so common, the second so rare in Ælfred's writing—make it worth quoting.

Then I gathered me darts<sup>2</sup> and pillar-shafts and stead-shafts, and handles for each of the tools which I was able to work with, and “bay timbers” and “bolt timbers,” and for each of the works which I knew how to work, the most beautiful wood, which, felling, I could bear away. Neither came I home with an overweight ; it pleased me not to bring all the wood home, (even) if I could carry it all. On each tree I saw somewhat of that which I needed at home. Therefore I advise every one who may be strong enough and have many a wain, that he go to the same wood where I cut these pillar-shafts, and there fetch himself more, and load his wains with branches, so that he may make many a trim wall and many a beautiful house, and build a fair town of them, and there may dwell joyfully and peacefully both winter and summer as I (till) now have not yet done. But he who taught me, to whom the wood was pleasant, he can make me dwell more peacefully, both in this passing dwelling on this wayfaring, while I am in this world ; and also in the

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<sup>1</sup> The suggestion of the parable is Wüller's. The houses Ælfred mentions as built by him are the books he has translated, fetching his materials from the wood (of Literature). But much more material remains behind. Let others, his friends, go and fetch it in, and build with it, as he has done. Yet here, in St. Augustine and others, there is the material for another house, eternal in the Heavens.

<sup>2</sup> “Darts,” “javelins,” must mean here poles sharpened at one end like spears, for driving into the ground.

eternal home which he hath bid us hope for through St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Jerome, and many of the holy fathers ; even so I believe also that he will make (for the worthiness of them all) both this wayfaring better than it was ere this time ; and especially enlighten the eyes of my mind, to this end, that I may find the way to the everlasting home, and everlasting honour and everlasting rest which is promised to us through the holy fathers. . . . May God grant that I have power for both—to be useful here, and surely to go thither.

The translation is made up from Augustine's Latin into two English books ; and a letter of Augustine's *De Videndo Deo* is added. The letter is thrown into a dialogue, and this is done in order to harmonise it with the *Soliloquia* which are couched in the form of a dialogue between Augustine and his Reason. The first book is called by the editor a collection of flowers. "Here end the blossoms of this book"; and this flower-title is given also to the second book. The third book (that derived from Augustine's *Letter*) closes with the words: "Here end the sayings of King Ælfred," etc. The date is probably 900.

But his eager spirit, even when tamed by the approach of death, would have desired to do something new. And Williani of Malmesbury tells us that he translated part of the *Psalms of David*. "Psalterium transferre aggressus, vix prima parte explicata vivendi finem fecit." It is supposed that we have in the first fifty Psalms in prose of a Psalter called the *Paris Psalter*, this last piece of Ælfred's literary labour;<sup>1</sup> and it is a work we may well imagine his spiritual intellect would do with comfort before he died. He did not live to finish it. In 901, "the unshakeable pillar of the West Saxons, a man full of justice, bold in arms, learned in speech, and above all, filled with the knowledge which flows from God," passed away and was buried at Winchester.

<sup>1</sup> This is a suggestion, merely a suggestion, of Wilker's. Wichmann has endeavoured to prove Ælfred's authorship of these fifty Psalms. But Dr. Douglas Bruce of Pennsylvania, in an elaborate dissertation on the Anglo-Saxon version of the Psalms, commonly called the *Paris Psalter*, has, I think with good reason, shown that Ælfred's authorship of these Psalms is open to the gravest doubt. But this doubt does not deny that Ælfred did translate some of the Psalms—only that the *Paris Psalter* Psalms are his work.

Only two books not done by himself appeared, as far as we know, in his reign. The first was the *Dialogues of Gregory*, translated at Ælfred's instance by Werfrith of Worcester, and with a preface written by the king. Werfrith is not mentioned in the preface, but both Asser and William of Malmesbury speak of him as the translator. These *Dialogues* are divided into four books, and contain the conversation of Gregory with his deacon Peter. Their subject is the lives and miracles of the Italian saints, and in the fourth book the life of the soul after death. The doctrine of Purgatory, as held in the Middle Ages, may be said to have been settled in this fourth book. Ælfred's preface, given in full by Earle in his *Anglo-Saxon Literature*, brings us, as usual, close to his character.

I, Ælfred, have clearly known that it is specially asked of those to whom God has given high rank on this earth, that they should bend their minds to the divine law, in the midst of earthly carefulness; therefore I sought of trusty friends that they would translate the following dialogues, that I, being strengthened through their warning and love, may at whiles think on heavenly things amid the troubles of this world.

The other is the *Book of Martyrs*. This is allowed, after Cockayne's arguments, to date from Ælfred's time, and was probably compiled at his desire. It begins with the 31st of December, with St. Columba; and ends with the 21st of December, with St. Thomas. Of course, the fewness of these remains does not assert that no other books were made in English. But the silence is expressive. And Ælfred's loneliness and sadness, as he drew to the close of life, makes all the more impression on us, when we think that his effort to make a literary class was a failure, and that he himself was the only important English writer in his kingdom. Asser's *Life of the King*<sup>1</sup> was written in Latin. Plegmund and John the Old Saxon seem to have been quite

<sup>1</sup> That Asser wrote this book has been questioned again and again. But we have little reason to doubt that the bulk of the book is by the man whose name it bears. Additions have probably been made to it, legends inserted, events coloured and heightened to glorify the King, but on the whole its record is historical, and contemporary with Ælfred.

silent. The writer of the king's wars with the Danes in the *English Chronicle* was probably Ælfred himself. Werfrith appears to have been forced into translating the *Dialogues of Gregory*, and to have done no more. The king really stands by himself ; and yet he had far heavier work to do than any of his friends. No figure is lonelier and nobler in the long gallery of the literary men of England.

The character of Ælfred as warrior, ruler, and statesman has been sufficiently displayed by historians old and new, but of that part of his character which appears in his literary work we may here say a few words before we bid him farewell. The more intimate personality of the king, that tender, naïf, simple, humble, self-forgetful nature, which played like a child with the toys of knowledge, with the Greek and the Roman tales ; which would have been weak through sensitiveness were it not for the resolute will to attain the full height of his royal duties, would have remained unknown to us, had he not been a writer as well as a king. What that inner personality was is sufficiently clear from the extracts I have given, and those who read them will, each in his own way, feel the man.

'There are, however, points belonging to the intellectual character of Ælfred which have a remarkable interest. He was the only man in his kingdom who was filled with so great a curiosity for knowledge, and whose range of interests was so wide, that his spirit might justly be compared with that of the men of the Renaissance. In this he stood far above mere scholars like Asser or Werfrith, who were probably more than content with what they knew. Ælfred was never satisfied. This was the peculiar grace in him, that he would not only live well as king, but learn the life beyond a king's, know as well as act, belong to the world where pursuit and its object had no end. No limit lay to learning.'

It may be that the first seeds of this unquenchable curiosity were sown in Rome, where he lived among the records and ruins of the past, where every stone still awakens the desire to know. It is more than probable that at the Frankish court he heard

the story of the love of learning which was so strong in Charles the Great, and that, even as a boy, he urged himself to imitate the Emperor. It is certainly true that when he came to the throne, he acted precisely as Charles had acted. He sent for foreigners to help him in educating his people, as Charles had sent for Alcuin and others. He tried, as Charles had done, to get a nest of learned men in his court. He made, like Charles, schools for his nobles, and forced them, like Charles, to learn. He set up schools and monasteries, without the success of Charles. Asser and Werfrith and other men had the same friendly relation with him that Einhard and Alcuin, Peter of Pisa, and Paul the Lombard had with Charles. And he collected the old songs of his English people, as Charles had reduced to writing and learnt by heart the old Teutonic sagas—"those most ancient songs of the barbarians, in which the actions of the kings of old and their wars were chanted." Indeed, in this collecting of his country's songs, Ælfred began to feed his curiosity; and his main curiosity was to find out everything he could about his own land. Nothing lay deeper in his heart than love of England, even though he ruled over so small a part of it. English songs, as we have seen, engaged his boyhood; English poetry his manhood. He sought from Bæda's history to know the foundations of English policy and English religion. He sought from sailors who had seen the Baltic to know what manner of land it was where the English lived before they came to his own England. He mastered the existing English laws; he set on foot a national history; he recorded what he himself had done for England in war and peace. He determined to learn Latin, because knowledge was hidden in that tongue; and when he had gained it, he made all he read into English that his own people might know all that he knew. It was a misery to him that England was not as athirst for knowledge as himself. The words in which he expresses his pity for England's loss of learning in the past, and his hope for all she might gain in the future, are such as a Roman scholar of the early Renaissance might have used concerning his own country.

But his curiosity was not satisfied with the knowledge of England. He desired to know the world beyond ; not only what he could learn from the men he fetched from the Continent, not only the courts and nations with which he was politically connected—this might be the desire of any king—but also the past history of great peoples, their manners, their ways in war and peace, the stories of their poets, the theories of their philosophers, the course of religious life among them, the geography of ancient lands, and the discoveries of new lands. He sent messengers even to the East. It is strange, in the midst of an England dead to pleasure of this kind, to suddenly meet with this eager personage. It is not strange to find, when he lives in this sphere, that he then forgot his kingship and only remembered the new worlds of learning which he had to conquer. When he is talking to Asser or Ohthere, when he is writing to Werfrith or to his people about literature, kinghood slips off him. When he is speaking of Greece or Rome or the Germans, he writes without a trace of insularity. Hence in all his work, even in his policy to the Danes, there is an extraordinary absence in Ælfred of any national feeling as against other nations. His patriotism, his sense of kingship, were strong, but they were modified by a clear recognition that all men who loved knowledge were of the same country and of the same rank—one in the commonalty of literature. This also is characteristic of a man of the Renaissance. Along with this eagerness to learn there was the same eagerness to teach which marked the men of the New Learning. He risked his popularity as a king by his endeavour to make his people study. He seems to think that his nobles, clergy, and people must feel on this matter as intensely as himself. To educate became a part even of his religion. To give money for a school was to give to God.

But that which, even more than a passion for knowledge and for teaching, brings him into line with the scholars and artists of the New Learning is his individuality. The personal element stands forth clear in all his literary work. It is this which takes even translations out of the region of the commonplace, and

which lifts his prefaces into literature. In war, and as a king, he had genius; but in literature he is either a plodder or a child. He never rises into any original power, not even in the *Chronicle*, or in the additions to the *De Consolacione Philosophiae*. But the aspiring personality of the man animates and pervades the poverty of the work with a humanity which pleases us more even than good writing. He has all the gracious naïveté of a child. He plays with the Greek stories like those of Orpheus and of Ulysses and Circe, with the same kind of natural simplicity with which Turner treated them in painting; and this naturalness has so much charm that we should regret to lose it in finish of style and in art of words. In all that is personal he belongs to literature. He creates his character in his subjects, and the impression he made upon the future writing of England is owing to that, and not to his literary ability. It was a great thing to do.

What, then, is his place? He has no originality as a worker in literature, no creative power. He was a good receiver and a good reproducer of knowledge. Even where he seems to be original, he may not be so. We do not know how much of the additions to the Boethius may be derived from Asser's conversation. But the style is his own; its simplicity is as effective in prayer and philosophy as it is in the *Chronicle*, and very pleasant coming from a great king. It is also pervaded by a strong desire for clearness and for use, and by a love of his people. It succeeds in being clear and useful, and it pleases by the force of these elements; but most of all, perhaps, by the deep feeling for his people which animates and warms it. We might also say that his long intercourse with public affairs and with the management of wars adds a weight to the style, of which, as we read, we are vaguely conscious. But even when all this has been said, the king, in literature, is but a learner, not, in any sense of the word, a master.

## APPENDIX



PASSAGES FROM THE WRITINGS OF KING  
ALFRED, SELECTED AND TRANSLATED  
FROM THE OLD ENGLISH BY KATE M.  
WARREN

KING ALFRED AT WORK

*The following account of Alfred is not from his own writings, but from the Latin "Annals" of his reign written by Asser. It forms a fitting preface to the king's work in literature. The translation is that given in Bohn's edition.*

ON a certain day we were both of us sitting in the king's chamber, talking on all kinds of subjects, as usual, and it happened that I read to him a quotation out of a certain book. He heard it attentively with both his ears, and addressed me with a thoughtful mind, showing me at the same moment a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein the daily courses, and psalms, and prayers which he had read in his youth were written, and he commanded me to write the same quotation in that book. Hearing this, and perceiving his ingenuous benevolence, and devout desire of studying the words of divine wisdom, I gave, though in secret, boundless thanks to Almighty God, who had implanted such a love of wisdom in the king's heart. But I could not find any empty space in that book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters ; wherefore I made a little delay, principally that I might stir up the bright intellect of the king to a higher acquaintance with the divine testimonies. Upon his urging me to make haste and write it quickly, I said to him, "Are you willing that I should write that quotation on some leaf apart ? For it is not certain whether we shall not find one or more other such extracts which will please you ; and if that should so happen, we shall be glad that we have kept them apart." "Your plan is good," said he, and I gladly made haste to

get ready a sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me ; and on that same day I wrote therein, as I had anticipated, no less than three other quotations which pleased him ; and from that time we daily talked together and found out other quotations which pleased him, so that the sheet became full, and deservedly so ; according as it is written, “The just man builds upon a moderate foundation, and by degrees passes to greater things.” Thus, like a most productive bee, he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many various flowers of divine Scripture, with which he thickly stored the cells of his mind.

Now when that first quotation was copied, he was eager at once to read, and to interpret in Saxon, and then to teach others. . . . Inspired by God he began to study the rudiments of divine Scripture on the sacred solemnity of St. Martin (Nov. 11), and he continued to learn the flowers collected by certain masters, and to reduce them into the form of one book, as he was then able, although mixed one with another, until it became almost as large as a psalter. This book he called his Enchiridion or Manual, because he carefully kept it at hand day and night, and found, as he told me, no small consolation therein.

FROM ALFRED'S OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF  
GREGORY'S *PASTORAL CARE*

(See pp. 8-12)

HOW THE TEACHER OUGHT TO VIEW HIS AUTHORITY

ONE man is born like another, but the difference of their merits keepeth some back behind others, and their sins hold them there. Verily, then, the Divine Judgment remembereth the difference which cometh from their sinfulness, and that all men cannot be alike, and willetteth that one should be upraised through another. Therefore all those who have to be above others must not think so much nor so often of their own lordship as of how like they are to other men in nature ; and they must not rejoice that they are over other men so much as that they can be very useful to other men. So it is said that our forefathers were shepherds, and also the Lord said to Noah and to his children, " Grow ye, and multiply, and fill the earth, and your awe and your fear shall be over all the beasts of the earth." He did not say over other men, but over beasts ; while he was forbidden power over men he was allowed it over beasts. Man is in nature better than unthinking beasts, but he is not better than other men. Therefore it is not said that other men ought to fear him, but the beasts. For it is unnatural overbearingness that a man should wish that his like should fear him ; and yet it is needful that a man should fear his lord, and the servant his master. Therefore when the teachers perceive that those who are under them fear God too little, then there is need that they make them at least fear human might, so that they who dread not the Divine Judgment may not dare to sin.

(Chap. XVII.)

WHY THE TEACHER SHOULD DESIRE POPULARITY

It is fitting that good rulers should desire to please men, so that through their own pleasantness they may make their Lord pleasing to the people, and through the honour in which they are held they may

draw their neighbours to love of the truth ; not only because they desire that men should love them themselves especially, but so that the love of them may be a way by which they can lead to the love of our Maker the hearts that are willing to hear them. And it is very hard for a man to hear willingly a teacher whom he doth not love. Therefore he who is to be over others must strive to please, so that he may be listened to. And yet he may not seek love of himself for himself, lest he find that he is the enemy, in the hidden thought of his mind, of Him of whom, in his daily service, he is openly the servant.

(Chap. XIX.)

#### DIFFERENT MEN MUST BE TAUGHT IN DIFFERENT WAYS

It is not fitting that we should teach all men in one way, because they are not all of one mind and of one behaviour. For often the same teaching which helpeth one hurteth another, even as herbs and grass of many kinds are in nature. On some beasts fatten, on some they die. Even as with soft whistling one quieteth a horse, so also with the same whistling one may rouse a hound. There are also many leechdoms which lessen some diseases and strengthen others ; bread, also, which increaseth the might of strong men lessenneth that of children. Because of the difference of the hearers must the words of the teacher be different, so that he may fit himself to all his hearers, to each after his own measure, and yet not so as to swerve at all from the law and from right teaching.

What may we say, then, are the inmost thoughts of men but as it were the strings of a harp tightly stretched, which the harper very diversely striketh and moveth, and thereby causeth that they make no sound different from that which he desireth ? He toucheth all with one hand because he willeth that they should make one tune, though he may move them diversely. So must every teacher with one teaching, but with varied counsels, stir up the mind of his hearers to one love and one belief.

(Chap. XXIII.)

#### HOW BEST TO REPROVE THE PROUD

It is to be borne in mind that one can often the better reprove the proud, if amidst the reproving one feedeth them with some praising. One ought to tell them of some good things which they have in themselves, or which they might have if they have not. So may we best cut away that which we mislike in them, if we first make them hear from us somewhat that may please them, and so draw their mind to us that it may be the more pleasant to hear whatsoever we

will for them of blame or of teaching. Therefore they are to be reminded of the good things which they have done before, so that they may be the more pleased to hear what one wisheth to tell them. Even as with wild horses, when we first have caught them, we smooth them down, and stroke them with outspread hands, and subdue them, so that after a time we may fully teach and tame them with rods. So also the physician, when he prepareth bitter herbs for a certain drink, he sweeteneth it with honey, lest he (*i.e. the sick man*) perceive at the first the bitterness of the herb which is to heal him ; but when the taste of the bitterness is hidden by the sweetness then is the deadly humour in the man slain by the bitter drink. So with proud men, one must temper the beginning and the opening of reproof and of blame, and mingle it with praise, so that for the pleasantness of the praise and the flattery which they love, they may also suffer the blaming and the reproving which they shun.

Also we may often the better persuade the proud to our will if we let them know what great need we have of them, as if it were more needful to us than to themselves that they do well, and we furthermore ask them that for our sake they cease from their evil ways. The proud are the more easily turned to good if they know that other men also have need of them.

(Chap. XLI.)

FROM ALFRED'S OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF BAEDA'S  
*ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH  
PEOPLE*<sup>1</sup>

(See pp. 12-13)

KING EADWINE TAKES COUNSEL AS TO THE ADOPTION  
OF CHRISTIANITY IN HIS KINGDOM IN PLACE OF HEATHENISM

THEN had the king speech and counsel with his wise men, and asked them all singly how it seemed to them this new teaching should be looked at, and the worship of the Divine Nature which was therein taught.

Then answered him his head-priest, named Coifi, "See thou, O King, what this teaching is that is now preached to us. I truly avow to thee that I have surely learned that no power or usefulness at all hath the faith which up till now we have held and followed. For none of thy thegns more straitly or more gladly gave himself to the worship of our gods than I, and nevertheless there are many who have received greater gifts and benefits from thee than I have, and in all things have had greater profit. Indeed I am sure, if our gods had any power, that then would they help me more because I the more earnestly served and obeyed them. Therefore if thou see that these things newly preached to us are better and stronger, methinketh it be wise that we receive them."

Another counsellor of the king, an ealdorman, agreed with these words, and took up the speaking, and thus said: "In this way, O thou King, seemeth to me this present life of man on earth when likened with the time unknown to us: it is even as if thou shouldst be sitting at meat with thine ealdormen and thegns in wintertide, and a fire be kindled, and the hall warmed, and it rain and snow and storm without, and a sparrow should come and fly swiftly through the house, coming through one door and going out through the other. Behold, for the time he is within he is not touched by the storm of winter, yet that is

<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship has expressed some doubt as to Alfred's authorship of this translation, but there is as yet no sufficient evidence against it.

but the twinkling of an eye and the smallest while, and forthwith from winter into winter he goeth back. So also this life of man appeareth for a little while ; what may go before or what may follow after, we know not. Therefore if this teaching bring us aught surer and more seemly, it is worthy that we follow it." Like words to these spake other ealdormen and counsellors of the king.

Then again Coifi said further that he wished more carefully to hear Paulinus the bishop speaking about the God whom he preached. Then the king bade it so be done. When he then had heard his words he cried out and said thus : " Plainly I see that that was naught which we followed. For so much as I the more carefully sought in that faith the very truth, so I found it the less. Now, then, I openly avow that, in this teaching, the very truth shineth that can grant us the gift of eternal blessedness and the salvation of eternal life. Wherefore, then, I now advise thee, O King, that the temple and the altars which we have hallowed, without the gain of any good, we now quickly spoil and burn with fire." So, therefore, the king then openly avowed to the bishop and to them all that he would firmly forsake idolatry and receive the faith of Christ. (A.D. 627.)

(Book II. Chap. X.)

#### HOW CÆDMON BECAME A POET

In the monastery of this Abbess<sup>1</sup> there was a certain brother especially famous and marked out by a divine gift, for he was wont to make seemly songs concerning faith and goodness, so that whatsoever he learned from scholars of the divine writings, that, after a little while, he brought forth well-wrought in verse, with the greatest sweetness and liveliness, in the English tongue. And by his songs the minds of many men were often fired to disdain of the world and to fellowship with the heavenly life. And so also many others after him, among the English people, made devout songs, but yet none could do that like unto him. For he was not taught by men or through a man to know the craft of verse, but he was divinely helped, and through the grace of God received song-craft. And he therefore could never make any light or idle song, but even that only which had to do with goodness and which it was seemly for his devout tongue to sing.

He had lived in the worldly state until the time when he was grown in years and had never learned any song. And therefore often at the merrymaking where for sake of mirth it was ordered that they all in turn should sing to the harp, when he saw the harp coming near him he arose for shame from the table and went home

<sup>1</sup> Abbess Hild at Streoneshalh or Whitby (A.D. 657-680).

to his house.] When at one time he had done this, he left the house of good-fellowship and went out to the cattle-shed, of which the care had been given to him that night. When he then at due time had there thrown his limbs upon the bed and slept, there stood by him a certain man in a dream and hailed him and greeted him and called him by his name : “Cædmon, sing me something.” Then answered he and said, “I cannot sing, and for that I went out from this merry-making and came hither, because I could not sing.” Again he who was speaking with him said, “Yet thou couldst sing.” Then said he, “What must I sing ?” He said, “Sing me the beginning of all things.” When he then had received this answer he began at once to sing in praise of God the Maker verses and words which he had never heard, of which the manner is this :—

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,  
meotudes meahte and his modgeþanc,  
weorc wuldorfaeder, swa he wundra gehwaes,  
ece drihten, or onstealde.  
He aerest sceop eorðan bearnum  
heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend ;  
þa middangeard, monncynnes weard,  
ece drihten, aefter teode  
firum foldan, frea aelmihtig.<sup>1</sup>

Then he arose from that sleep and all that he had sung in sleep he had fast in mind, and to those words straightway added many words of noble song to God in the same measure. Then came he in the morning to the town-reeve who was his ealdorman, telling him what gift he had received ; and he forthwith led him to the Abbess and spoke and made it known to her. Then she bade assemble all the most learned men and the scholars, and had him tell of the dream in their presence and sing the song, so that by the judgment of them all it should be decided how or whence it had come.

Then was it seen by them all, even as it was, that a heavenly gift had been given to him by the Lord Himself. Then they set forth and told him a certain holy story and words of divine lore, and bade him then, if he could, turn it into the sweet sound of verse. When he had then received the matter he went home to his house ; and he came again in the morning and sang and returned to them, wrought in the best of verse, what had been given over to him.

<sup>1</sup> The literal translation of Alfred's West Saxon verse is as follows :—“ Now must we praise the Guardian of the heaven-realm, the Maker's might and the thought of His mind, the work of the Glory-Father, how He, the eternal Lord, set the beginning of every wonder. He first shaped, for the children of earth, heaven for roof, holy Shaper ! Then middle-earth, the Guardian of mankind, the eternal Lord, afterwards made, as floor for men, Lord Almighty ! ”

Then the Abbess honoured and loved the gift of God in the man, and she advised and charged him to leave the worldly state and take on monkhood, and he fully agreed. And she received him into the monastery with his goods and united him to the congregation of the servants of God ; and bade him be taught the whole course of holy history and narrative. And he kept in his memory all that he could learn by listening, and, even as a clean beast chewing the cud, he turned it all into the sweetest verse. And his song and his verse were so winsome to hear that his teachers themselves wrote them down from his mouth and learned them.

(Book IV. Chap. XXIV.)

FROM ALFRED'S OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF THE  
*HISTORY OF THE WORLD* BY OROSIUS

(See pp. 14-16)

THE WEALTH OF OHTHERE

(*This passage is a continuation of that given on p. 226*)

HE was a very wealthy man in those goods in which their wealth lieth, that is in wild-deer. He had then, when he came to the king, of unsold tame deer, six hundred. Those deer they call rein-deer; six of them were decoy-deer, which are very valuable among the Fins because they catch the wild rein-deer with them. He was among the first men in that land, yet he had not more than twenty head of cattle and twenty sheep and twenty swine, and the little that he ploughed he ploughed with horses. But their wealth is mostly in the tribute which the Fins pay to them. That tribute is in deer-skins, and in feathers of birds and whale-bone, and in the ship-ropes which are made of whale's hide and seal's. Each payeth according to his rank. The highest rank must pay fifteen marten-skins, and five of rein-deer, and one bear-skin, and ten measures of feathers, and a kirtle of bear or otter skin, and two ship-ropes, each to be sixty ells long, one made of whale's hide and the other of seal's.

(Book I. Chap. I.)

A ROMAN TRIUMPH

(*The description of the Triumph itself is entirely Alfred's insertion*)

The Romans were so greatly slaughtered there (*in a battle with the Etruscans, etc., B.C. 480*), though they had the victory, that the only one of their consuls who was left refused the triumph which they brought towards him when he was coming home, and said that they would have done better to meet him with wailing than with a triumph.

What they called a Triumph was when they had overcome any people in battle then it was their custom that all their senators should

come to meet their consuls after the battle, six miles from the city, with a chariot adorned with gold and gems, and they must bring two white four-footed beasts. As they went homeward then must their senators ride in chariots after the consuls, and drive before them, bound, the men who had been taken captive, so that their honour should be the more glorious. But when they had got any such people into their power without a battle, then, as they came homeward, one had to bring to meet them from the city a chariot which was adorned with silver, and one of each kind of four-footed beasts, in honour of their consuls. That was then a Triumph. (Book II. Chap. IV.)

#### JULIUS CÆSAR'S INVASION OF BRITAIN

After he had overcome the Gauls, he went into the island of Britain, and fought against the Britons, and was put to flight in the land that one calleth Kentland. Soon after that he fought again with the Britons in Kentland and they were put to flight. Their third fight was near the river that one calleth the Thames, near the ford that one calleth Wallingford. After that fight the king and the townspeople who were in Cirencester bowed to him, and then all who were in the island.

(Book V. Chap. XII.)

## FROM THE *OLD ENGLISH CHRONICLE*

(See pp. 13-14)

### KING ALFRED'S WARS WITH THE DANES

871. IN this year came the Danish army to Reading in Wessex, and three nights after two earls rode up into the land. Then Ealdorman Æthelwulf met them at Englefield, and there fought with them and had the victory. Four nights after that King Æthelred and Ælfred his brother led a great army to Reading and fought with the Danish army, and there was great slaughter on either hand, and Ealdorman Æthelwulf was slain, and the Danes kept the field.

And four nights after, Æthelred the king and Ælfred his brother fought with the whole Danish army at Ashdown. And they were in two companies ; in one was Bagsecg and Healfdene, the heathen kings, and in the other were the earls. And King Æthelred fought with the company of the kings, and King Bagsecg was slain ; and Ælfred his brother fought with the company of the earls, and there were slain Earl Sidroc the elder, and Earl Sidroc the younger, and Earl Osbearne, and Earl Fræna, and Earl Harold ; and the Danish companies were both put to flight, and many thousands slain, and they were fighting until night.

And fourteen nights after that King Æthelred and Ælfred his brother fought with the Danish army at Basing, and there the Danes had the victory. And two months after King Æthelred and Ælfred his brother fought with the Danish army at Merton, and they were in two companies, and they put both to flight and far into the day had the victory ; and there was great slaughter on either hand ; and the Danes kept the field. And there Bishop Heahmund was slain and many good men. And after this fight came a great summer army.

And the Easter after that King Æthelred died ; and he had reigned five years ; and his body lieth at Wimborne.

Then his brother Ælfred, son of Æthelwulf, took the kingdom of the West Saxons.

And about one month afterwards, King Ælfred with a little band

fought the whole Danish army at Wilton, and far into the day put them to flight, and (*but*) the Danes held the field.

And in this year were nine pitched battles fought with the whole army in the kingdom south of the Thames, besides that Ælfred the king's brother and single ealdormen and king's thegns often rode at them in raids which one did not count ; and during this year were slain nine earls and one king ; and in this year the West Saxons made peace with the Danish army.

878. In this year the Danish army stole away in mid-winter to Chippenham and harried the land of the West Saxons, and settled there, and drove many of the people over sea ; and the greater part of the rest they harried, and the people bowed to them, except King Ælfred, who, with a little band, went to the woods and into the moorfastnesses. And this same winter was the brother of Ingwær and Healfdene in Devonshire in Wessex, with twenty-three ships, and they slew him there, and eight hundred and forty men of his army with him.

And the Easter after, King Ælfred, with a little band, built a stronghold at Æthelney, and from that stronghold was fighting against the army, together with that part of the men of Somerset who were nearest. Then in the seventh week after Easter he rode to Egbert's Stone, east of Selwood, and there came to him all the men of Somerset and Wiltshire and that part of Hampshire which is on this side of the sea, and were fain of him. And he went one night from the camp to Iglea (Highley ?) and the night after to Ethandune (Eddington ?), and there fought the whole army and put it to flight, and rode after them to the stronghold, and encamped there fourteen nights. And then the Danish army gave him hostages and great oaths that they would go from his kingdom, and promised him also that their king would receive baptism ; and they fulfilled that. And three weeks after Godrum the king, with nine and twenty of the men who were worthiest in the army, came to Aller, which is over against Æthelney. And the king received him there in baptism, and his chrism-loosening<sup>1</sup> was at Wedmore ; and he was twelve nights with the king, and he greatly honoured him and his companions with gifts.

893. In this year the great Danish army which we have before spoken of went again from the East Kingdom (*Kingdom of the East Franks*) westward to Boulogne, and there were shipped so that they got over in one crossing, with horses and all ; and they then came up

<sup>1</sup> The ceremonious removal of the linen band which was put about the head when anointing took place at baptism.

the mouth of the Limen with 250 ships. That mouth is on the east of Kent, at the east end of the great wood that we call Andred. The wood is along from east to west 120 miles long, or longer, and thirty miles broad. The river which we have before spoken of runneth out from that weald. On this river they towed up their ships to the wood, four miles from the outside of the mouth, and there took a stronghold ; within this fastness were a few countrymen, and it was half-built.

Then soon after that came Hæsten with eighty ships up into the mouth of the Thames, and built a stronghold at Milton, and the other Danish army was at Appledore.

896. In that same year the aforesaid army built a stronghold on the Lea, twenty miles above London. After that, in the summer, there went out a great part of the townsfolk and also of the other people until they came to the Danish stronghold ; and there they were put to flight and some four of the king's thegns slain. Then in harvest time the king encamped in the neighbourhood of the town while they reaped their corn, so that the Danes might not hinder them from taking the harvest.

And upon a certain day the king rode up by the river, and looked where the river might be blocked up, so that they could not bring out their ships. And they then did this : they built two strongholds on the two sides of the river. When they had then already begun the stronghold and had therefore encamped, then the Danish army perceived that they could not bring out their ships. So they left them and went overland until they came to Bridgenorth on the Severn and there built a stronghold. Then the king's army rode west after the Danish army, and the men of London fetched the ships, and all those which they could not bring they broke up, and those which were fit for use they brought into London.

And the Danes had their women fast in East Anglia before they left that stronghold. Then they encamped the whole winter at Bridgenorth. That was three years after they came hither over the sea to the mouth of the Limen.

897. Then afterwards in this year, in the summer, the Danish army broke up, some went into East Anglia, and some to Northumbria, and those who were moneyless got ships and went south over sea to the Seine.

The Danish army had not, by the grace of God, utterly broken the Angle race, but they were much more broken in those three years by the deaths of cattle and men, most of all because many of the best of the king's thegns died in those three years. . . . In that same

year the Danish forces in East Anglia and in Northumbria greatly harassed the West Saxon land on the south coast with their preying bands, most of all with the “æscs” (*ships*) which they had built many years before. Then King Ælfred bade long ships be built against the “æscs”; those were very nearly twice as long as the others. Some had sixty oars, some more; they were both swifter and steadier and also higher than the others. They were not shapen in the Frisian nor the Danish fashion but as it seemed to him that they might be most useful.

Then at a certain season in the same year there came six ships to Wight, and these did much evil both in Devonshire and everywhere along the sea-coast. Then the king bade go to them with nine of the new ships, and get in front of them in the open sea before the mouth. Then came they (*the Danes*) with three ships out against them, and three stood above the mouth on the dry, the men were gone from them up into the land. Then they (*the English*) took two of the ships at the outer mouth and slew the men, and the one (*ship*) escaped. In that one also were all the men slain but five. Those got away because the ships of the others (*the English*) were aground. They, also, were very awkwardly stranded: three were aground on the side of the water where the Danish ships were stranded, and the others all on the other side, so that one could not come to the other. And when the water had ebbed many furlongs from the ships then went the Danes from those three ships to the other three which were be-ebbed on their side, and they fought them there. There was slain Lucumon the king’s reeve, and Wulfheard the Frisian, and Æbbe the Frisian, and Æthelhere the Frisian, and Æthelferth the king’s companion, and of all men, Frisian and English, sixty-two, and of the Danes, one hundred and twenty.

But the flood-tide came first to the Danish ships, before the Christians could shove theirs out, and they therefore rowed away out. Then were they so disabled that they could not row along by the land of the South Saxons, but the sea washed two of them to land, and they took the men to the king at Winchester, and he bade hang them. And the men who were in the one ship came into East Anglia sorely wounded.

That same summer, no less than twenty ships, with men and all, were lost on the south coast.

FROM KING ALFRED'S OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF  
THE *CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY* BY BOETHIUS

(See pp. 17-24)

(*The passages given below are largely made up of King Alfred's original additions to the text of Boethius*)

THE FIRST AGE OF THIS WORLD

EALA ! how blessed was the first age of this world when there seemed enough to every man in the fruits of the earth ! There were not then wealthy dwellings, nor many dainty meats nor drinks, nor did they care for costly raiment, because these were not yet ; nor in any wise had they seen or heard of them. They cared not for any evil luxuries, but most meetly followed nature ; they always ate once in the day and that was at evening. Fruits of the trees they ate, and roots ; they drank not any bright wine, nor knew they how to mingle honey with water, nor did they care for silken garments of many colours. They always slept out under the shadow of the trees, and they drank clear water of the wells. Nor had any trader seen island or shore, nor had any man then yet heard of a ship-army,<sup>1</sup> nor, indeed, heard at all of a fight. Nor then was the earth as yet stained with blood of the slain, nor furthermore, had any man been wounded. No one had yet seen evil-minded men, and none such had honour, nor did any one love them. Eala ! that our times now might be such ! 'But now the greed of men is as burning as that fire in the hell which is in the mountain called Ætna in the island of Sicily. That mountain is always burning with brimstone, and it burneth up all the places round about. Eala ! who was the first greedy one who earliest began to dig after gold and gems, and found the perilous treasure that before was hidden and covered with the earth ?

(Chap. XV.)

<sup>1</sup> i.e. a war-fleet ; an allusion to the Danish pirates.

## THE HIGHEST HAPPINESS

When Wisdom had sung this song then she left off singing, and was silent a while, and began to think deeply in her inmost mind, and then said : " Every mortal man troubleth himself with divers and manifold cares, and yet all wish by different paths to come to one end ; that is, they wish by different merits to come to one blessedness, which then is God, who is the beginning and the end of every good, and He is the Highest Happiness."

Then said the Mind : " This it seemeth to me is the Highest Good, that one should need no other good, nor moreover care for it, when he hath that which is the roof of all other goods, because it holdeth all other goods that are without, and hath all within itself. It were not the Highest Good if any were outside, for it then would have to desire a certain good which it had not."

Then answered Wisdom and said : " It is very clear that that is the Highest Happiness because it is both the roof and floor of all good. What is that then but the best happiness which gathereth into itself all other happinesses, and encircleth those which are without, and holdeth them within itself, and hath want of none nor need of none, but they all come from it and go back to it even as all waters come from the sea and all come back to the sea ? There is no spring so little that it seek not the sea, and back from the sea flow in upon the earth ; and so it is creeping over the earth until it come back to the same spring from which it before overflowed, and so back to the sea.

" This is now an example of the true happiness which all mortal men long to get, though they think to come at it by various ways. For each man hath natural good in himself, because each mind longeth to get the good, but is hindered by the fleeting goods because it is more inclined thereto. So some men think that it is the best happiness that one should be so wealthy that he should not need anything more, and after this they long all their life. Some men think it is the highest good to be the most honoured among their fellows, and with all their might strive after that. Some think that the highest good is in the greatest power ; these wish for one of two things, either themselves to rule or to attach to themselves the friendship of rulers. Some then consider it the best that one should be renowned beyond others, and far famed, and have great glory ; they strive for that in peace and war. Many hold it for the greatest good and the greatest happiness that one should be always merry in this present life and fulfil all desires. Some then who want wealth, want it because thereby they would have greater power, so that they might enjoy these worldly pleasures more securely, and also this wealth. Many there are of those who wish for power because they would

gather unmeasured riches, or again they wish to spread abroad the glory of their name.

"For such and other such fleeting and failing honours is the inmost mind of every man troubled with yearning and striving. It thinketh that some high good hath been won when it hath captured the flattery of the people, but to me it seemeth that it hath bought a very empty glory. Others seek after wives with great eagerness, so that they may beget many children and also live pleasantly. Now, I say, that true friends are the most precious thing of all this worldly happiness ; they are not indeed to be counted as worldly goods, but as divine. For deceitful Fortune bringeth them not forth, but the God who made them by nature to be our kinsmen. For every other thing in this world a man wanteth either because he can come to power thereby, or to some worldly pleasure,—except a true friend; him a man loveth sometimes for love and for faithfulness, though he expect no other gift from him. So Nature joineth and glueth friends together with most undividable love. But by these worldly things, and by this present weal, one maketh oftener foes than friends.

"By these and by many like things it may be known to all men that all bodily good is less worthy than the powers of the soul."

(Chap. XXIV.)

#### WEALTH AND POWER ARE NOT THE HIGHEST GOOD

Wisdom maketh her lovers wise and worthy, temperate, patient, and just, and filleth him who loveth her with all seemly ways. That they cannot do who have power in this world ; nor can they give those who love them any virtue from their wealth, if they have it not in their nature. By that it is very clear that the great have no special power from their worldly wealth, but the wealth has come to them from without, and they cannot have from without anything of their own. . . . If then honour were the natural kindred of wealth, and were of it, or the wealth of the wealthy were his own, then it could not forsake him. If the man who owned it were in any land soever that he might be, then were his wealth and his honour with him ; but because wealth and power are not his own therefore they leave him. And since they have by nature no good in themselves therefore they are lost as shadow or smoke. Yet the false thinking and the imagination of foolish men persuade them that power and wealth are the highest good ; but it is all otherwise. When the great are in a strange land, or in their own country among wise men, then both to the wise and to the strangers their wealth is for naught as soon as they perceive that they (*the great*) were not chosen for any virtue but because of the praise of foolish folk. But if these there had aught of

their own, or of natural good, in their power, they would then have that with them, though they had lost their authority. Nor would they have lost any natural good, but that would always follow them and make them ever worthy in whatsoever land they were.

(Chap. XXVII.)

### TRUE HIGH-BIRTH IS IN THE MIND

Why vaunt ye over other men for your birth, without ground, now that ye can find no man not high-born? But all are of like birth if ye will remember the first creation, and the Creator, and, since that, the begetting of each of you. But true high-birth is in the mind, it was never in the flesh, even as we have said before. But every man who is altogether enslaved by his evil ways forsaketh his Creator and his first origin and his high-birth, and from thence shall be lowered in degree until he shall become as (one) low-born. (Chap. XXX.)

### A HYMN OF ADORATION

Eala! Lord, how great and how wonderful Thou art! . . . Thou who movest all restless creatures to Thy will, and Thyself remainest ever at rest and unchanging. For none is mightier than Thou, none like to Thee, nor was it any need that taught Thee to make that which Thou hast made, but by Thine own will and by Thine own power Thou hast wrought all things, though none of them was needful to Thee. Most wonderful is the nature of Thy goodness, because it is all one, Thou and Thy goodness; the good did not come to Thee from without, but it is Thine own. But all that we have of good in this world has come to us from without, that is, from Thee. Thou hast no envy towards anything because none is more skilful than Thou, nor is any Thy like; for all good Thou didst plan and work by Thine own thought. No man gave Thee example, for there was none before Thee who could make aught or naught; for Thou didst make all things most good and most fair, and Thou Thyself art the highest good and the fairest. . . . Thou hast made the soul that she must ever turn on herself even as all this sky turneth, or as a wheel turneth, musing about her Maker, or about herself, or about these earthly things. When she thinketh about her Maker then is she above herself; when she thinketh about herself then is she in herself, and she is beneath herself when she loveth those earthly things and admireth them. Lo, Thou, O Lord, hast given to souls a dwelling in heaven, and givest to them there worthy gifts, each according to its deserving, and makest them to shine most brightly and yet with most diverse brightness, some brighter, some less bright, even as the stars,

each according to his deserving. Lo, Thou, O Lord, has brought together heavenly souls and earthly bodies, and dost mingle them in this world. Even as they have come hither from Thee so they also go hence to Thee. Thou didst fill the earth with divers kinds of cattle, and afterwards didst sow it with seed of trees and herbs. Grant now, O Lord, to our minds, that they may rise to Thee through the hardships of this world, and by those troubles come to Thee; and with the open eyes of our mind we may see the noble Fount of all good ; the which Thou art. Give us therefore sound eyes for our mind, that we may fasten them on Thee, and drive away the mist which now hangeth before the eyes of our mind, and enlighten the eyes with Thy light, for Thou art the brightness of the true light, and Thou art the soft resting-place of the righteous, and Thou art the beginning and the end of all things. Thou bearest up all things without labour. Thou art both the way and the guide, and the dwelling whither the way leadeth. Towards Thee all men are moving.

(Chap. XXXIII.)

#### TRUTH IS IN THE SOUL

Whosoever will search deeply with his inmost mind after right, and will not that any man or any thing should hinder him, let him then begin to seek within himself what he before sought for without himself, and forsake useless taking of thought as much as he can, and gather about that one thing, and say to his own mind that it can find within itself all the good it seeketh from without. Then will he be able very quickly to perceive all the evil and the vanity that he before had in his mind, as clearly as thou might see the sun ; and thou shalt perceive thine own inner thought to be much brighter and lighter than the sun. For no heaviness of the body nor no evil habit can altogether draw away righteousness from the mind, though the sluggishness of the body and evil habits often trouble the mind with forgetfulness, and lead it astray by the mist of error, so that it cannot shine as brightly as it would. Yet a grain of the seed of truth is ever dwelling in the soul while the soul and the body are together.

(Chap. XXXV.)

#### THE TRUE BLESSEDNESS

Then said Wisdom, "Well, O men, well ! Let every one who is free strive towards goodness and blessedness ; and whoso now is bound by the vain love of this earth let him seek freedom that he may come to blessedness. For that is the one resting-place of all our toil, that is the one haven always calm after all the tempests and

the surgings of our toiling. That is the one place of peace and the one comfort of the miserable after all the miseries of this present life. But gold and silver stones, and every kind of gem, and all this present weal, enlighten not at all the eyes of the mind, nor at all whet their sharpness for beholding true happiness ; but they rather blind the eyes of the mind than sharpen them. For all the things which please us here in this present life are earthly and are therefore fleeting. But the wonderful Brightness which enlighteneth all things, and ruleth all things, willetteth not that souls should perish, but willetteth to enlighten them. If then any man can see the brightness of the heavenly light with the clear eyes of his mind, then will he say that the brightness of the shining of the sun is darkness beside the eternal brightness of God."

(Chap. XXXIV.)

#### WISDOM THROWS OPEN THE DOOR OF TRUTH

Now I avow to thee, (Wisdom), that I have found a door, there where I before saw only a little chink, so that I could hardly see a very little gleam of light from out this darkness. And though thou didst before show me the door, I could not the more find it, only I groped about for it where I saw the little light twinkle. I said to thee, long ago, before, in this same book, that I knew not what was the beginning of all things ; then thou didst show me that it was God. Then again I knew not the end, until thou didst show me again that that was also God. Then I said to thee that I knew not how He ruled all created things, but thou hast now very clearly shown me. It is as if thou hast thrown open the door which before I had been seeking.

(Chap. XXXV.)

#### ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

"Thou needest not wonder greatly though we are (still) searching into that which we have begun upon, either with less words or with more, by whichever we can (best) explain it. Though we now must give many and diverse examples and parables, yet our mind hangeth alway on that into which we are searching. Nor do we take up these examples and these parables for love of the false tales, but because we would betoken the truth thereby, and would that it should be of use to the hearers. Straightway I call to mind a certain saying of the wise Plato, how he said that the man who would tell a parable ought not to take a story too unlike the matter he then would speak of. But hear now patiently what I now wish to tell, though once it seemed to thee vain."

Then Wisdom began to sing, and said : " Happy is the man who can see the clear well-spring of the Highest Good and can cast off from himself the darkness of his mind. We must tell thee once more a parable from the old false tales.

" It happened of yore that there was a harper in the country called Thracia, which was in the realm of the Greeks. The harper was very unusually good, and his name was Orpheus. He had a very peerless wife, who was called Eurydice. They used to say of the harper that he could harp so that the wood swayed, and the rocks stirred themselves for the sound, and the wild beasts would run to him, and stand, as if they were tame, so still that though men or hounds went toward them they shunned them not. They said that the harper's wife died and her soul was taken to hell. Then the harper became so sad that he could not be among other men, but withdrew to the woods, and sat upon the hills both by day and night, and was weeping and harping so that the woods trembled, and the waters stood still, and no hart shunned any lion, nor no hare any hound, nor did any beast know any anger or fear towards another, because of the sweetness of the sound. Then it seemed to the harper that nothing pleased him in this world, and then he thought that he would seek the hell-gods and soothe them with his harp, and pray that they would give him back his wife. When he had gone thither then there came towards him a certain hell-hound, whose name was Cerberus, who had three heads ; and he showed gladness with his tail, and leapt about him for his harping. There was also there a very horrible gate-warder whose name was Charon, he had also three heads and was exceedingly old. Then the harper begged that he would protect him while he was there and bring him safe back from thence. And he promised him that, because he longed greatly after the rare music. Then he went further, until he met with the dread goddesses which men of the people call Parcae ; they say that these have no mercy on any man but visit every man according to his works ; they say that they rule the fate of every man. Then he begged for their favour, whereupon they wept with him. Then he went further, and there ran towards him all the hell-dwellers, and took him to their king, and began to speak with him and to pray for that which he prayed. And the unstill wheel to which Ixion, King of the Levitas (*Lapithæ*), was bound for his guilt, stood still for his harping. And Tantalus the king, who was unmeasuredly greedy in this world, and whom that same sin of greediness followed there, was quieted ; and the vulture, they say, left off tearing the liver of King Tityus whom before he had thus been tormenting ; and all the torments of the hell-dwellers were stilled while he was harping before the king. When he long and long had harped, then the king of the hell-dwellers cried out and

said : ‘Let us give back his wife to the man, for he hath earned her with his harping.’ Then he bade him see well to it that he never looked back after he once was on the way thence ; and said that if he looked back he must lose the woman. But one can very hardly, or not at all, forbid love. Wellaway ! verily Orpheus led his wife with him until he came upon the borderland of light and dark, and the woman went after him. When he came forth into the light, he looked back towards the woman, whereupon she was straightway lost to him.

“These false fables teach every man who would flee the darkness of hell and come to the light of the True God, that he should not look back to his old evil doings, so that he do them again as fully as he did before. For whosoever with full will turneth his mind to the evil deeds which he before had left, and then doeth them fully, and they please him fully, and he never now thinketh to leave them, then he shall lose all his former good, except he repent.” (Chap. XXXV.)

#### WISDOM SPEAKS ONLY TO THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR HER

Then said I, “Nothing ever seems to me so true as thy teaching at the times when I hear it. But if I turn me to the judgment of this people then not only will they not believe thy words, but they will not even hear them.” Then said she, “That is no wonder. Verily thou knowest that the men who have unsound eyes cannot look full easily towards the sun when it shineth brightest, nor do they even like to look on the fire, or anything bright, if the apple of the eye be weak. So are sinful minds blinded with their evil will that they cannot look at the light of the Bright Truth which is the Highest Wisdom. . . . Wherefore they do not like to search into every teaching until they know the right, but turn to their vain wills and search into those. So I know not of what use it is that thou shovest me to foolish men who never search after me. I never speak to them, but I speak to thee, because thou dost set thyself to search after me, and dost toil more hardly on the track than they do. Nor do I reck what they think.” (Chap. XXXVIII.)

#### ON THE NATURE OF GOD

“We ought with all our might to search after God that we may know what He is. Though it may not be within our power to know what He is, yet we ought to seek to know, according to the measure of the understanding which He giveth us, even as we said before that one has to know each thing according to the measure of our understanding, because we cannot know each thing such as it is. Yet every

creature, both reasoning and unreasoning, maketh it clear that God is eternal ; for never would so many creatures so mighty and so fair bow down to a lesser creature and a lesser power than they all are themselves, nor, furthermore, to one of like greatness."

Then said I, "What is eternity ?" Then answered Wisdom, "Thou askest me what is great and difficult to understand ; if thou wilt know it thou must first have the eyes of the mind clean and clear. . . . One thing therein thou must of need know—why God is called the Highest Eternity." Then said I, "Why ?" Then answered she, "Because we know very little of that which was before us except by memory and by asking, and still less of that which cometh after us. That only is truly present to us which at the time is ; but to Him is all present, both what was before and what now is, and what shall be after us ; all that is present with Him. His wealth waxeth not, likewise it never waneth. Nor doth He ever remember aught, for He hath never forgotten aught. He seeketh nothing nor pondereth anything, for He knoweth it all. He seeketh nothing because he hath lost nothing. Nor pursueth He any creature because no creature can flee Him. Nor doth He dread any creature because He hath none stronger than Himself, nor indeed any like. He is always giving and naught of His ever waneth. He is ever Almighty because He ever willeth good and never evil. Nothing is needful to Him. He is ever looking, He sleepeth never. He is ever kind alike. Alway He is eternal, for the time never was that He was not, nor ever shall be. Alway He is free, nor is He forced to any work. Because of His godlike power He is everywhere present. His greatness can no man measure ; yet is that to be thought of as not of the body, but of the Spirit, even as now Wisdom is, and Righteousness, for He Himself is that."

(Chap. XLII.)









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